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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Real life, real drama, real T.V.: Aussie Footy on TSN

by

David Cook

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of "Master of Arts".

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECRECREATION

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1995

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Real life, real drama, real T.V.: Aussie Footy on TSN submitted by **David Cook** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Garry Smith

Dr. Ann Hall

Dr. William Beard

Sept. 22, 1995

Dedication

To my wife Lois. Thank-you for your patience and support.

Abstract

This thesis examines the production of an Australian Rules Football (ARF) highlights program, its consumption by cable TV viewers in Canada, and the meanings that result. The analysis of the context of production or the encoding process focuses on why and how the highlights program is produced and marketed. A semiotic analysis examines the messages and meanings encoded in the television text. The analysis of the consumption of the program or the decoding process focuses on why the highlights program is telecast on Canadian cable TV and how viewers interpret the text.

By examining Australian production and Canadian consumption of the ARF program, insight is gained into how television sport messages are communicated and what meaning is produced in a cross-cultural setting. Through this multi-focused approach the degree of distortion between production (or encoding) and consumption (or decoding) processes was assessed to be minimal.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Scope

After viewing on Canadian network television the 1984 Grand Final which is Australian Rules Football's equivalent to the Super Bowl, Mike Rutsey of the local press struggled to describe the spectacle;

> Envision a bar-room brawl on a grass oval measuring 180 yards by 150 yards or a rugby match with the players wired on acid. (Rutsey cited in Grant, 1985).

Analogies such as these prompt a series of questions:

1. When Canadians watch Australian Rules Football (ARF), what do they make of it?
2. Is the Canadian audience's interpretation of televised ARF consistent with the intentions of the program producers? If not, how do they differ?
3. What can a case study of "Aussie Footy" in Canada reveal about the production and consumption of television sports?

In attempting to address these questions, this investigation focuses on the communication of television messages in the context of broader cultural considerations.

The study acknowledges that production, (or the encoding of a message) and consumption (the decoding of the message) are not isolated processes but moments in a circuit of cultural production (Johnson, cited in Gruneau et al., 1988). This circuit involves mutually interacting moments of production including not only the producer constructing a television program and the viewer interacting with it but the context in which production decisions are made.

Specific production moments of the ARF highlights program telecast in Canada are investigated in this study. (It should be noted that "Australian Rules Football" is now officially called, "Australian Football", although most Canadians know the game by its former title). One might expect that when a televised sport is encoded in one culture (Australia) and decoded by audiences in another culture (Canada) that different meanings could result (Eco, 1972). The degree of distortion is not known, however, until an investigation of the production moments are completed. This issue is examined in the analysis.

The case study is framed around five research questions which are discussed below:

1.1.1. Why is the Australian Rules Football highlights program produced for overseas audiences?

Although not a high priority, the promotion of ARF overseas has been an objective of the Australian Football League (AFL), the sports governing body. Immediately inside the cover of each recent annual report, these intentions are clearly stated under the heading, "Corporate Aims and Philosophies":

> ... our aims are that Australian Football, because of its entertainment, spectacle, patronage and level of participation, become recognised as Australia's national sport and, ultimately, achieves recognition and participation in other areas of the world (AFL Annual Report, 1993).

Among recent strategies employed to achieve this aim have been the establishment of a national competition in Australia, the securing of a lucrative television contract, and the creation of a weekly ARF highlights package for overseas audiences.

The AFL's push for expansion shifted into overdrive during the 1980s. Television played an important role in this process because of its traditionally strong alliance with ARF. Corporate raids and economic instability within the Australian television industry during the 1980s both enabled and constrained the expansion of ARF. Channel 7, which had exclusive domestic television rights for ARF, went into receivership; but this opened the door for more financially solid ownership structure. Significant events in the forty-year relationship between ARF and television have been analyzed with particular reference to how entrepreneurial strategies and events such as 7's collapse in 1988 impacted the development of ARF and consequently shaped the production of the highlights program. The analysis also locates the highlight program within a political/economic context where a commodity-producing logic predominates. The program is a product designed to create a new revenue stream for the AFL. Conventional business practice, not just the AFL's conviction that ARF is a great game that needs to be shared with the rest of the world, help drive the production process.

1.1.2. How is the highlights program produced and marketed in Australia and overseas?

Television production and sport marketing are not only shaped by political/economic structures but also limited by technical/organizational practices (Gruneau, 1989). While the highlights program is shaped by the executive producer, certain industry conventions about what makes "good television" guide production decisions (Whannel, 1992). In turn target marketing uses the four p's of product, price, place and promotion to track audiences to maximize television profits. The practices of the commercial television industry help to carefully construct the ARF product.

During the last eight years, the key players in the ARF production and marketing team have been the Australian Football League (known as the "Victorian" Football League prior to 1990), the 7 television network, Broadcom Australia Ltd., and Vuecast Pty. Ltd. Within this grouping, the AFL has the final say in all executive decisions. Decisions about who retains domestic and international television rights and the responsibility for production of programming and marketing of Australian football are made by the AFL. The 7 Network first joined AFL's team as the domestic telecaster in 1957. Since this time, 7 has made the starting line up more often than not, with the current contract maturing in 1998. Seven has grown up with the AFL, and the two are close corporate partners. In 1986, the AFL shocked the 7 Network by asking Broadcom, a private multimedia production and marketing company, to join the team for six years. Because 7 was having financial problems, the AFL contacted Broadcom in an attempt to stabilize television revenues. Broadcom assumed responsibility for the production, packaging, and sale of football to all television interests and satellite networks. A re-organization transpired in 1988 when 7 reclaimed domestic television rights while Broadcom continued with overseas marketing and production responsibilities only.

Another key player was added to the team in 1991 when Vuecast, a private video production company, took over production of the highlights program. A more recent organizational change was the May, 1994 decision by the AFL to take marketing responsibilities in-house, thus dropping Broadcom from the active football television production roster.

Each player in the production/marketing team over the last eight years has impacted not only television programming but the success of the ARF product. The development of ARF has been carefully planned and ARF highlights programs are an integral part of this planning. Seven, 100-minute football games are presented in a 50-minute television program which focuses on the most entertaining game segments.

The investigation into how the ARF is represented on television involved surveying the intentions, practices, and priorities of key players on the production/marketing team. Specifically, by outlining the producer's intent in the highlights program and the perceived target audience, insight is gained into the limits set by the encoding moment. Television production creates not just programs but also audiences (Buckingham, 1987).

1.1.3. What messages are embodied in the highlights program and how are they engendered?

The semiotic analysis of a program attempts to address ways in which the audience may discern various readings of ARF. Essentially, this process involves an academic in isolation generating hypotheses about how the program is read. However, because audiences bring different kinds of prior knowledge to the program, semiotic analyses may not account for the ways real audiences make sense of television (Buckingham, 1987). This methodology can direct our attention to preferred readings of the program but not necessarily to readings relevant to a particular audience's social environment. Textual analyses need to be complemented by investigations of audience interactions.

In this study, an investigation of the encoding process outlined how the ARF highlights program is partially composed according to entertainment codes and conventions. For example, football programs use a camera code which moves from long shot to medium shot and then close-up when action breaks down (Whannel, 1992). The shape of the program also reflects the creativity of the producer and her/his particular style.

The semiotic analysis in this study does not concentrate on what is denoted by production techniques (although some shot-by-shot investigation is necessary). Rather, it focuses on what connotations these techniques produce. Connotations use the first sign (or denotation) as its signifier and attaches meaning to it, another signified, (e.g. a close-up of

an athlete's face) becomes the signifier and "personalization" the signified. This second level of signification demonstrates how signs can stand for a whole range of cultural values. Not only can a sign associate an image with a concept but it also engenders various feelings (Abercrombie, 1988). This variance in signification is a feature of semiotic analysis. Both visual and auditory signs are examined in this study. Particular attention is paid to the anchoring effects of commentary in the production of preferred meanings (Whannel, 1984).

1.1.4. Why is the highlights program telecast in Canada on The Sports Network (TSN)?

The medium conveying the program to the audience plays an integral role in the meaning-making process. Telecasts present specific images and sounds to limit the number of audience interpretations. In appealing to a mass audience broadcasters sometimes aim their sports coverage to the lowest common denominator. For example, during the American network (ABC) coverage of the 1994 World Cup, visual chalkboards and everyday terminology were used to explain soccer to the uninitiated American public. Like novices, they were led by the hand through the basics of the football code. In contrast, by "narrowcasting", cable television secures a market niche by targeting specific audiences. For their World Cup coverage, The Sports Network, a 24-hour sports-only cable channel, used a British television feed supplemented by local studio segments. TSN's audiences are assumed to be very knowledgable about sports which eliminates the need for tedious explanation segments and, in theory, allows cable producers more artistic freedom. While the range of potential audience readings remains limited, cable producers are offered a wider array of image and sound options.

The television sport genre has identifiable characteristics and a recognizable structure which guides the audience's understanding of what is going on in specific programming. However, the opportunities presented by the cable medium means that producers no longer have to churn out a traditional formulaic program. (Whether or not cable producers take advantage of this opportunity is another question.)

In Canada, the esoteric sport of ARF is accessed by the public through a highlights package telecast by TSN. Over the air networks simply have no programming space

available. This situation presents both constraints and opportunities for the highlight package. On the one hand, TSN is not always available to cable subscribers, let alone non-subscribers, since it is part of an extended (and therefore more expensive) channel package. On the other hand, TSN viewers not only tend to have a keen interest in sports but are also prepared to subsidize this interest by paying for a cable sports service.

TSN subscribers gain access to a smorgasbord of sports programming ranging from less premium novelty type shows to higher profile professional sports spectacles. Arcane sports which would never see the light of a cathode tube on network television, are now on display for the cable-viewing public to scrutinize. However, since first licensed in 1984, TSN has moved increasingly toward producing more premium live sports programs centred on National Hockey League (NHL) and Canadian Football League (CFL) competitions. These programs yield good ratings and profitable advertising contracts. The off-shoot of this trend is that taped programs such as the ARF highlights show, while still an intregal component of TSN programming, receive less emphasis by management. Their position is being threatened.

This prioritization is partly reflected in the reduced number of programming slots allocated to ARF in 1994. In 1992, Australian Rules Football was shown three times a week for 24 weeks, while in 1995 it is being telecast only two times a week for four weeks. The constraints and opportunities presented by TSN help shape what sense Canadians make of ARF. When the game is shown infrequently on a discretionary cable sports channel, there is less opportunity for program/viewer interaction and certain less favourable interpretations are more likely than others. Extended coverage gives a sport legitimacy and status. An investigation of the Canadian readings of ARF must acknowledge the role of TSN in shaping these readings.

In attempting to answer the question, "Why is the highlights program telecast on TSN?" this study examined Vuecast production, AFL marketing, and TSN programming philosophies and their connections to audience understanding.

1.1.5. How do Canadians interpret the ARF highlight package?

TSN has no doubt influenced the public perception of ARF in Canada; however, the specific interaction between the Australian program and the Canadian viewer requires closer examination. It is mainly through the reading (or decoding) process that the program becomes meaningful. Reading is an active process in which a range of interpretive choices are possible. This decoding is limited by the medium used, the program itself (i.e. the encoded messages), the context in which the program is encountered, and the discourses at the disposal of the audience (Buckingham, cited in Turner, 1990). Reading by individual viewers is a complex process. It is certainly more dynamic than the direct reception of messages and cannot be assumed by one semiotic reading the program.

In this exploratory investigation of the decoding moment, a focus group approach was used to address the specific ways in which Canadians make sense of the ARF highlights program. There may be similarities between the Australian producer's understanding of the program and the Canadian audience's understanding. Both parties are knowledgeable about the characteristics of the television sport genre and possess the skills to read programs. However, this study identifies differences between Australian and Canadian understanding of the football program.

The concept of program flow was also examined. Hobson (1982) and Buckingham (1987) found that viewers of British soap operas talked about general program content rather than focusing on specific episodes. Buckingham concluded that television viewing may be one of flow in which the boundaries between programs become blurred. Whether program flow applies in this case study of television sport is discussed (for example, do Canadians focus on a particular program or talk about Australian Rules Football generally? Is the boundary between the television representation and the sport itself blurred?).

1.2 Significance of the Study

Research into televised sport has focused on network broadcasts of sporting spectacles. The Olympics, World Cup Soccer, and the Super Bowl have been dominant research topics perhaps because of their high television ratings and perceived impact. No doubt the 1994 World Cup television coverage will generate numerous research articles.

There is a need to balance spectacle research with case studies of cable "narrowcasts" which target specific audiences. The intensity of the interaction between cable programming and viewer may be significant. Big network spectacles may not necessarily result in intimate audience relationships. To attract mass audiences, sports spectacle broadcasts are aimed at being more entertaining and dramatic than informative. Strategic details are secondary to special effects; visual style is substituted for journalistic substance.

American network coverage of the Super Bowl embraces production values equal to any in the world, but its journalistic values are not nearly as prominent. Alternatively, cable narrowcasts are not limited by the constraints of mass appeal and therefore can be more informative for their knowledgeable target audiences. Entertainment remains an essential component of cable programming because subscribers demand a value for money package of information, entertainment, and drama where the programming emphasis is sometimes skewed toward presenting information. This study investigated the opportunities and constraints provided by cable television sport, an area all but ignored by mainstream television research. The extent to which these boundaries impact specific programming are discussed, as there is usually a gap between potential and practice.

The ARF highlights program which forms the basis of this study is significant because it is a prime example of the type of exotic shows telecast on TSN. Sports such as Australian Rules Football are seen as more than just program fillers because they help TSN develop a distinct identity. Part of TSN's licensing mandate is to telecast events for which the over the air networks do not have room (Houston, 1994). TSN cannot bid for the Olympics, Stanley Cup, or Grey Cup broadcasting rights. Consequently, Australian Rules Football and other less premium sports are an integral part of TSN's 24-hour programming. All of these exotic programs have relatively small but enthusiastic audiences who subscribe to TSN for the viewing opportunities it presents. There are few investigations of this type of exotic programming, the production process, or the audience interaction.

The interaction between television programming and foreign audiences has received limited scholarly attention. Investigations have been conducted on how non-Americans perceive soap operas such as "Dallas" (Ang, 1985) (Leibes and Katz, 1990) but no studies

have examined sport programs. In this case study, a television sport program produced in Australia is carried by cable television to be read by Canadians without direct feedback between the parties involved. Because the communication is across cultures and the messages can be culturally specific, there is an increased chance of aberrant decoding by Canadians. Investigating the degree of message distortion can provide insight into meaning-making processes.

This study is significant because it examines both the encoding and decoding moments of production. The Australian context of production, the Australian text, Canadian readings and their interconnections are surveyed (as opposed to one particular area being mined). Because of time and financial constraints, only certain aspects of the three areas are examined. This approach can be criticized on the grounds of superficiality and oversimplification, but the study is meant to be exploratory rather than definitive in nature. It poses more questions than it answers, but it also avoids reductionist assumptions (e.g. accounting for the producer's intent by analyzing program content) and should give direction to future research.

Finally, the focus on Australian Rules Football reflects the personal interests of the investigator; why such an arcane sport receives any coverage in Canada is intriguing in itself. Furthermore, Australian teams have played exhibition matches in both Vancouver (1987) and Toronto (1989) and a seven-team league has existed in the Toronto area since 1989. ARF receives numerous passing references in local and national media. It appears that some impact (however small) is being made on Canadian culture by "Aussie Footy".

1.3 Limitations and Assumptions

1. A request to conduct an ethnographic study of production/marketing processes (or the precise encoding moment) was denied. The political/economic climate in the Australian television industry is one of corporate upheaval and change, and the Australian Football League has always operated under a cloak of secrecy where all public communication is screened. In light of this situation, the refusal to allow a participant/observation investigation is not surprising, (for a full explanation of the economic context, see Chapter Four).

2. The qualitative nature of the investigation (i.e. the use of interview and semiotic and focus group methodology) has certain limitations which include:

- Interviews not only rely on interviewees being able to accurately articulate their ideas, impressions, and feelings but to sometimes be able to explain why they have these. Interviewees may not always possess these capabilities.
- Semiotic analyses are often conducted by an academic in isolation and are difficult to replicate because there is no prescribed analytical process. The sign, consisting of the signifier and the signified, is the starting point; but the remainder of the process can vary considerably.
- Focus groups represent an artificial gathering of people and lack the naturalness of ethnographic methods. There is some uncertainty about the accuracy of what people say in focus groups (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups are most useful for exploratory research.
- Case study methodology (e.g. small sample size) limits generalization to a larger population. Findings from this investigation of ARF cannot be applied to all televised sports events.

These limitations are counter-balanced by the opportunities the methodology allows. For example:

- Interviews allow the researcher to have control over the data generated by the use of direct questioning. Comparisons between interviews are possible when a similar schedule of questions is used.
- Semiotic analyses direct attention to preferred readings of texts. Certain hypotheses are generated which can be explored by audience research.
- Where financial and time constraints exist, focus groups can be conducted relatively cheaply and quickly. They present the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction in a short period of time (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups are simply one of many different social groupings.
- Focus groups are able to explore obscure topics or circumstances that participants rarely think deeply about (e.g. ARF). They may be items

negligibly important to them as ordinary citizens, coping with the pressures of the real world (Templeton, cited in Morgan, 1988). However, deeper levels of meaning can be obtained by focus group methodology. Participants are asked why they think in a particular way or how they arrive at certain conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction to the Critical Perspective

This review is presented from a critical perspective where the contribution of British cultural studies to communication analyses is acknowledged. This does not preclude the need to examine other approaches, but a balanced treatment where all major viewpoints are covered is not attempted. There is a threefold reason for this: First, researchers do in fact tend to tackle material from particular perspectives. Second, giving equal space to all views tends to result in superficiality and does not allow in-depth coverage of any particular approach (Morrow, 1993). Third, there is my conviction that while other perspectives offer important insights, studies from the critical paradigm pose more fundamental questions about meaning in everyday life. The following sections draw heavily on Graeme Turner's (1990) introductory text, British Cultural Studies.

British cultural studies has evolved over the past three decades within the critical paradigm. Like other critical approaches, its major departure from traditional approaches is its shift from a behavioural to an ideological focus. Ideology does not necessarily misrepresent what is real to mask political struggle; it is the site of everyday struggle (Turner, 1990). Gramsci's notion of hegemony is important here. The concept came to prominence in the 1970s and was used to distance cultural studies from economic determinism. A hegemonic relationship is "a relationship in which powerful groups temporarily dominate by their ability to persuade rather than coerce subordinate groups" (McKay, 1991:185). Ideology is not imposed on human agents but reproduced voluntarily. It is a situation where "Everyday practises are taken-for-granted and appear natural and consistent with cultural experience" (Young, 1991:5).

Although cultural studies is not a unified field, it does tend to assimilate culture to ideology. This is in recognition of the belief that culture is not a stagnant entity but a process, a shifting, unequal, endless contention among traditional and emerging voices, institutions, and ideologies (Turner, 1990). Culture is viewed as "... a lived network of practices and relationships that constitute everyday life, within which the role of the individual subject has to be foregrounded" (Turner, 1990:69).

In communication research, behaviourists view television as simply reflective of society and the messages produced as "given" (the hypodermic needle theory). From an ideological perspective, television messages are much more problematic. The main concern is how meanings are produced and consumed in society. Television sport analyses in the behavioural tradition focus on the consequences for the audience or the sport. For example, Celozzi and his associates (1981) examined the effects of televised sport violence on viewer behaviour and attitudes. Birrell and Loy (1979) espoused the corruption of sport thesis (i.e. sport has been forced to fit television, thus changing its very essence).

Ideological analyses attempt to understand how television reproduces the cultural conditions which allow certain groups to remain dominant in society. A popular, early topic was the implication of a media owned by an economic elite. The research agenda of British cultural studies has tended to mirror that of the Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which in turn has reflected the priorities of the sitting director. During the 1960s, the Centre's first director, Richard Hoggart, led the transition from media effects to ideological affectivity of the media. He was interested in understanding the everyday, lived cultures of particular social classes. The CCCS, like many British institutions at the time, was preoccupied with class struggles.

Stuart Hall initiated the focus on textual analyses during the 1970s. His prime concern was the relationship between media and ideology examined through the analysis of signifying systems in texts. Hall presented a media model in his 1972 article, "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse" (Revised and Published in 1980). While this model is now dated because it tended to over-emphasize the power of the text, it did make the following key points:

1. The production and consumption of messages are over determined by discourses of the medium used, the discursive context in which composition takes place, and technologies used to carry messages.
2. The television message may be polysomic but not totally pluralistic. There is a degree of openness about its meanings, but there are also limits.

3. If meanings are not predetermined by cultural codes, they are composed within a system that is dominated by accepted codes, (Turner, 1990).

During the 1980s, textual analysis gave way to a refocusing on social histories of everyday life. Richard Johnson steered a return to investigations of lived cultures. He conceptualized cultural production and circulation as a circuit involving mutually interacting moments of production. In television, these moments include the economic context of production, the producer's construction of the program according to conventions, and audience readings of the text. Johnson warned against making claims about the ideological nature of texts based on the social class of the author (i.e. beware of the reductionist trap).

In the 90s, the CCCS experienced some restructuring and became known as the Department of Cultural Studies under the leadership of Jorge Lorrain. The emphasis moved from the mass media to examining how societies manage to produce and reproduce themselves. Investigations of the complex processes which express texts, practices, and institutions into culture predominated.

Most of the studies discussed in this review have been influenced by CCCS research orientations. The analyses have been placed into three interrelated categories based on their primary unit of investigation. These are the context of television sport production, the content of television sport programs, and audience interaction with televised sport. This separation is somewhat artificial because there is considerable overlap between categories. Moores (1990) believes these analytical units should not be separated and a multi-focused approach adopted. It does, however, remain a useful organizing framework (Wenner, 1989; KinKema and Harris, 1992). The following literature review serves to inform the research questions and methodological choices made for this study.

2.2 The Context of Television Sport Production

Television sport is produced within two interrelated contexts. These are the broad political/economic environment in which programming originates and the technical/organizational pressures and limits on production (Gruneau, 1989). Investigations of context are often secondary to textual analyses of television sport programs. As a result, detailed analyses of the social context of production are uncommon. Sometimes, speculative

assessments of context are deduced from television content. Ideally, both production moments should be considered together and given equal emphasis.

2.2.1. The Political/Economic Context

Television sport production needs to be located within the broad social processes of its origin. In this study, the social background is western capitalist society which presents certain opportunities and constraints. Cantelon and Gruneau (1988) assert that, "without doubt there is an important set of pressures on cultural production which arises from the commodity-producing logic lying at the core of capitalist social processes" (p. 181).

Jhally (1984) has taken the commodity orientation, applied it to the areas of sport and media, and developed a thesis explaining the evolution of the sports/media complex. Central to this theory is the important role of television. Jhally explains that during the prosperous 1950s and 60s, sport represented a cost-efficient marketing vehicle through which television targeted affluent audiences. Audiences became a commodity to be traded by commercial television to advertisers. Market demand for audiences in turn increased the value of television rights to various sports. This provided professional sports organizations with large amounts of working capital. As a result of these processes, decisions such as event scheduling, rule adjustments, and franchise location were re-evaluated in terms of market imperatives. Commercial television then developed marketing plans to achieve higher audience ratings. A popular strategy was to develop a dramatic and entertaining sporting package of the highest quality. In order to execute this plan, television presentation and technology underwent significant innovation and change (Gruneau, 1989).

Whannel (1986; 1992) points out that these processes reflect a concern common in all entrepreneurial activity for minimizing uncertainty and risk in commodity production. Television attempts to maintain the entertainment value (and therefore market value) of the sporting program. By judicious use of stunning graphics, contemporary music, and instant replay, a television program featuring a boring football game can seem entertaining. But as Whannel (1986) warns, "television conventions as to what constitutes good entertainment have become a determining factor upon sporting cultures themselves" (p. 130).

To paraphrase Richard Gruneau (1989), in a consumer society infatuated with the lifestyles of the rich and famous, it comes as no surprise that part of television's definition of good sporting entertainment is a focus on individual heroes. It is further argued that this strategy complements the marketing objective of most sports programming and integrates the economic interests of individual athletes directly to the broader collection of interests that define the modern sports/media complex.

Several case studies have illustrated the capitalist constraints on television sport production. In an investigation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) coverage of a World Cup downhill ski race, Gruneau (1989 concluded that,

> ... the underlying codes defining good television and the elective affinity among producers, advertisers, and race organizers led to coverage that treated the existing structures and competitive promotional culture of the modern sports/media complex as natural-an example of "common sense." Television sports programs, like the one at Whistler, contribute directly to capital accumulation in the sports/media complex, but they also figure indirectly in winning consent for a dominant social definition of sport, ideally suited to a capitalist consumer culture. It is a definition in which sport is widely understood as a naturally open, achievement-based activity, conducted to further individual sports careers and to generate investment (p. 152).

Capitalist values are legitimated by television sport. The process is so transparent that it appears natural.

Using a figurational rather than a strictly cultural studies approach, Maguire (1990) focused on the interrelationships between the NFL, Channel 4, Anheuser Busch, and other developers of American football in England. Maguire contends that while this development cannot be explained by simple economic determinism, capital investment and entrepreneurial activity did play a significant role in the interdependencies that shaped the making of American football in England. In order to create an English market for their sport product (and to educate a new fan base), the NFL secured television coverage from Channel 4. Viewers of this program were then targeted for sales of NFL merchandise. Not only did this successful strategy accumulate capital very quickly, but it allowed the NFL logo to

"penetrate deep into the cultural terrain of English society in preparation for the endorsement of a particular set of products" (p. 227).

In their critical look at Australia Rules Football, Sandercock and Turner (1981) argue that television's emphasis on entertainment has helped legitimate the commercial priorities which have become an integral feature of ARF. The game is no longer about winning and losing but about television ratings.

Stewart (1983) expressed similar views and in so doing seemed to romanticize an idealized past. Stewart reckons that the reasons why market expansions are so naturalized and the appropriation of football by the ideology of business is so complete is that the game's administrators accept the desires of commercial forces as good for football. The corporate reorganizing of football for television into an entertainment spectacle typifies the penetration of sport by capitalism.

Goldlust (1986) claims that television has the power to redefine sport, not vice-versa. He believes the commodification of Australian football is indicative of the way in which more powerful groups in society (especially the television elite) appropriate collective cultural resources for their own corporate means. The elements of communal spectator sport are replaced by sport as commodity spectacle. Ten years after Jhally formulated his sports/media thesis, we now see clear evidence of it on a global scale. Media moguls such as Rupert Murdock and Ted Turner, together with sportswear specialists such as Nike and Adidas, are using sport in many countries as a profit vehicle. With the demise of communism in East Germany and the former USSR, the sport/media complex transcends traditional western capitalist boundaries. Murdock and Turner enjoy a significant economic advantage in a free market situation and are committed to strengthening their positions as the media elite (Gitlin, 1980). As Wagg and Goldberg (cited in Williams, 1994) explain, the infrastructure is now in place for big companies to get much bigger:

> ... In the new processes of globalization, sport seems to operate, increasingly, as a world language that helps to dissolve the traditional commercial, financial, geographical, and political barriers to multinationals selling world products in a global market (p. 394).

Sport is the vehicle through which the economic/media elite can direct production processes.

Critical analyses of the political/economic context have used a variety of methodologies ranging from empirical surveys to ethnographic studies. It is prudent to use multiple resources in the formulation of arguments demonstrating the constraints of capitalism. Failure to do so may result in an analysis which does not acknowledge how economic systems influence the production and circulation of meaning in television sport (Murdock and Golding, 1991). One should also recognize the opportunities presented for individuals within capitalist societies to express oppositional views and act accordingly to these views.

2.2.2. The Technical/Organizational Context

Television sport production is not only constrained by broad political/economic pressures but is also limited by specific technical/organization practices. Clearly, ideological structures are more pervasive in a television program than in the sports event itself. Television, however, claims to present games objectively and continually reaffirms this position with slogans such as, "real life, real drama, real TV.-TSN-The Sports Network." The realist claims by television were quickly debunked by researchers such as Buscombe (1975) and Clarke and Clarke (1982) who noted that television is not a window on the real world but a canvas upon which production artists express themselves. Even the images shown on a live telecast have been carefully selected by producers using entertainment criteria. Combine this visual representation with a dramatic narrative, and what actually happened is translated into a program that makes "good television" (Gruneau, 1989).

Highlighting the transformation from sports event to television event has preoccupied many scholars (Comisky et al., 1977; Hesling, 1986; Morse, 1983; Williams, 1977). Most, however, choose to describe the structure of telecasts rather than focus on the ideological limitations imposed by sportscasting codes and conventions. Williams (1977) performed a content analysis of NFL telecasts and found that the camera shooting pattern focused attention "on the ball and ball carriers to the exclusion of other players as well as of the overall geometry of the game" (p. 137).

Buscombe's (1975) collection of football analyses represented a watershed in sports television research. These investigations of television coverage of the 1974 Soccer World Cup made a fundamental shift from identifying the production characteristics of television sport to examining the meaning-making processes of production. Buscombe identified codes or sets of rules which guide the creation of visual segments and their organization into a meaningful program. Framing, camera placement, editing and lighting are all visual codes which shape the images of a sports event. By using tight framing and close-ups of individuals, a personalized image is provided for the viewer which shapes the messages and meanings constructed by them.

The significance of Buscombe's monograph and similar work by Masterman (1976) and Peters (1976) is summarized by Gruneau et al. (1988). "The important contribution of this work lies in its exploration of ways in which the visual style of sport programming works to naturalize coverage, minimizing audience awareness of the mediating effect of television" (p. 272).

Gruneau et al. (1988) also allude to one of the shortcomings of this research, namely neglecting the role of narrative in shaping preferred meanings. Not only does "colour" commentary dramatize a sporting event (Bryant et al., 1977, Comisky et al., 1977) but it uses narrative conventions to shape the meaning of television messages. Whannel (1984, 1986) points to the anchoring effects of commentary and the organizing theme of the sports storyline, "Who will win?" Often an epic tale of heroes and villains unfolds where the struggle between protagonists ebbs and flows, finally surging to a shattering climax. The creation and resolution of suspense, together with elements of individual personality and performance, are storytelling techniques adopted by television. Evidence of fictional elements in sports programs has been passed over by many media studies.

Another common oversight is the failure to establish how television produces a view of sport which is consistent with dominant ideological viewpoints (e.g. sport is equally accessible to everyone). This issue was addressed by McKay and Rowe in 1987. They believe that the selective processes of Australian television legitimate masculine hegemony, capitalist rationality, consensus, and militaristic nationalism as dominant societal values. At

the same time, television sport production marginalizes, trivializes, and fragments alternate ideologies of sport. These arguments are based primarily on qualitative analyses of television texts.

It is important to re-emphasize the point that television production processes and the content of sports programs are closely connected. Identification of certain emphases in television texts is used by MacNeill (1988) as a starting point for a discussion of the production of patriarchal ideology in society. In her comparative analysis of televised women's body building and aerobics, MacNeill illustrates how visual codes emphasize physicality in bodybuilding and sexuality in aerobics. Auditory codes re-affirmed traditional notions of femininity and sexual attraction for both sports. Objectification of the female body was most evident in the aerobics program.

Morse (1983) posits that the male body is objectified by the television production of American football. The male objectification process is legitimated by narrative based on a scientific theme (i.e. it is acceptable for men to look at men without homoerotic overtures, when it is done clinically). Evidence of an objectified and aestheticised masculinity is uncovered in Poynton and Hartley's (1990) analysis of televised Australian football. "Footy" is represented by television as the national sport and the locus of essentialized Australian masculinity.

Explorations of the ideological limitations of television sport need to be balanced by investigations of whether production practices provide moments of opposition or whether, as Morgan (1994) contends, the producer can only work within the space defined by the economic elite. As an example of an oppositional moment, Barr (1975) pointed to the incongruencies in the 1974 World Cup coverage between German visual feeds focusing on team strategy and English commentary which glorified individuals. Whannel (1984) observed a similar oppositional moment in the 1980 Olympics. In this case it was Soviet visuals and English commentary. The full ideological significance of production anomalies such as these needs further investigation.

The political/economic and technical/organization contexts of television sport production combine to formulate conventions about what constitutes good television

(Gruneau et al., 1988). These rules, while not formalized into an official policy document, are a component of the subconscious practice which shapes production. Real sport and real drama are transformed by production processes into real television. Any resemblance to the original activities is purely intentional (certainly not natural).

Insights into the technical/organizational context have been achieved by historical analyses (Whannel, 1992), interviews with production personnel (Goldlust, 1986), and ethnographic studies of television production (Stoddart, 1994). Future research will benefit from using a combination of these methods.

2.3 The Content of Televised Sport

Media researchers have been preoccupied with the analysis of program content and the structure of sports/television discourse (probably because of its ready accessibility). Before discussing these textual studies, three points need restating:

1. Television texts are inextricably linked to the processes by which they are produced, and any separation of these place arbitrary limits on the analysis.
2. Audiences interact with sports programs in different ways. Programs sway viewers toward particular interpretations of sport rather than toward others. These preferred meanings are often supportive of dominant ideologies.
3. Opportunities exist for television producers to insert alternate or oppositional segments into the sports program. Producers have relative autonomy. Viewers also exercise their restricted free agency by making sense of programs in ways counter to preferred meanings

(Kinkema and Harris, 1992; Fiske, 1990; Gruneau, 1989).

There is a lack of consensus about the proper method to analyze the content of television programs. Quantitative studies examining manifest content have identified numerically dominant tendencies in televised sport (Gruneau et al., 1988). By separating categories such as camera shots and commentary, certain American football research has concluded that the performance of individual stars was emphasized through the prominence of close-ups and dramatic narrative (Bryant et al., 1977; Comisky et al., 1971; Williams, 1977). However, this quantitative methodology presents some problems. Firstly, the

analytical separation of a sportscast into discrete components is problematic (how do you distinguish between a close-up and a medium shot?). Secondly, this technique assumes that numerical presence is directly proportional to audience impact. Thirdly and most importantly, numerical methods are unable to deal with the connotative aspects of visual signs or the unspoken messages and meanings evoked by the text. Gruneau et al. (1988) concluded that quantitative techniques grounded in behaviouristic assumptions about the containment of meaning in explicit messages work against understanding the discursive features of sport programming because they require decontextualizing in order to quantify. Qualitative analyses offer more insight into meaning-making processes.

Gruneau et al. (1988) attempted to develop categories for semiologically-oriented, qualitative analysis. The active notions of composition and movement were used to understand the interrelations between program segments and blocs of movement within it. This research suggested that sportscasts were composed around key oppositions such as play/non-play and tension and release. Gruneau et al. (1988) contend that,

> Major narrative themes which "set the scene" for game action are always posed in pre-game (non-play) segments, and are re-appraised during the game "breaks" and in the post game wrap-up. Furthermore, the rhythm of "game-time" coverage in television sport generally contains a rhythm or cadence of tension/release/re-appraisal that is nominally related to the degree and intensity of activity within the contests themselves (p. 273).

Clearly, program composition depends somewhat on the sport being covered, but production practices define the movement between play and non-play segments. Gruneau et al. (1988) explain that,

> Each program segment is composed through shot and sound sequences constituted according to codes of narrative, entertainment value, education, and actuality coverage. ... Movement from sequence to sequence and between segments themselves is accomplished through well established editing conventions such as fades, dissolves, cuts and wipes, often involving the conscious use of visual and

audio "markers" (e.g. shots of the coach or the crowd, interjections by colour commentary) to denote major transitions (pp. 273-274).

Of particular relevance to the current thesis is Gruneau et al.'s (1988) observation that sport variety shows differ from live shows because

1. The variety show attempts to educate the audience for unfamiliar viewing activities. This priority shapes the way play (often pre-taped) is covered.
2. The rhythm of the program is dominated by pre-packaged, non-play segments in contrast to real play coverage.

To pose narrative themes and facilitate the education of its viewers, the Australian Football highlights program is dominated by non-play segments. Television has taken a unique game and shown it to the world, but in so doing it has given it a distinctive TV sport appearance. Whannel (1992) continues with the theme of reconstruction in the production of edited highlights. He posits that elements of character and narrative are drawn together with peak moments of action pulled out of context and emphasized by commentary and replay. Time is carefully manipulated so the sports event becomes a television event.

Some of the dominant ideologies which McKay and Rowe (1987) believe to be legitimated by Australian television were outlined previously. They cite evidence from qualitative research and some content analyses to support their arguments. A television advertisement promoting rugby football is used to illustrate masculine hegemony, while the example of televised cricket statistics helps demonstrate capitalist rationality.

KinKema and Harris (1992) identify salient themes in televised sport which are shaped by dominant social ideologies. These themes include nationalism and international relations, gender relations, race relations, winning/success, competitive individualism, teamwork, violence, and consumerism. Although most of these themes are relevant to the current study, the ideological importance of a select few will be briefly examined here.

2.3.1. Nationalism/International Relations

Television coverage of sport spectacles such as the Olympics or Soccer World Cup display nationalist ideology. Jackson and McPhail's (1989) collection of analyses of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games illustrates how television representations promote

American ideology. Coverage of opening and closing ceremonies celebrates American capitalism and Hollywood entertainment values (Tomlinson, 1989). Athlete interviews focus on American patriotism and commitment to Olympic ideals (Rowe and Lawrence, 1989).

Television shapes the construction of national identity by characterizing foreigners in stereotypical ways. British World Cup commentary has described the Germans as methodical and machine-like, the Soviets as stoic and unimaginative, and the Argentineans as flamboyant but erratic (Hargreaves, 1986; Buscombe, 1975). Some oppositional messages in sportscasts have been documented. The black power salute at the 1968 Olympics symbolized American inequality (Whannel, 1984). Soviet visual feeds during the 1980 Olympics celebrated Communist supremacy. These ideals were soundly criticized by British commentary (Hargreaves, 1986). There is a need to seek out more of these oppositional moments in sportscasts to demonstrate how individuals can make unique contributions and not be dictated to by dominant ideology.

2.3.2. Winning/Success/Competitive Individualism

Sport is an activity where the prime objective is winning. Whannel (1984) points out that sports narratives are framed by the question, "Who will win?" Winning is not only celebrated by television but is highly valued by capitalist society. Within the winning framework lies the focus on individual performance even in team sports like football (Clarke and Clarke, 1982; Hargreaves, 1986). Television uses close-ups, isolated replays, and narrative to highlight star players (Whannel, 1992). It is interesting to note that television narrative sometimes attributes individual success to possessing the right personality. Athletic talent and training are trivialized by emphasis on the personal qualities of self-control, inner drive, initiative, and unselfishness (Sage, 1990). This characterization has special meaning in a capitalist society dependent on entrepreneurial activity. The flip-side of this argument is that poor performance can be attributed to character flaws. If losers have only themselves to blame, then societal power relationship and ideology cannot be brought into question. In their analysis of Olympic media texts, Rowe and Lawrence (1986) note that,

> ... enough cases of spectacular success can be drummed up to lend weight to the proposition that an inequitable social structure does not exist and that, ultimately, its victims are at fault for their personal failure, (p. 201).

Blaming the victim is commonly used to explain failure in our society.

Qualitative analyses of the content of television sport have identified the preferred readings of television programs. The best way to conduct semiological studies is still problematic, but Gruneau et al. (1988) provide a solid starting point. It must be remembered that semiological analyses reveal very little about production and consumption of television sport.

2.4 Audience Interaction with Television Sport

The audience interaction with television sport has not been prominent in the media research agenda. This is thought to be the result of a number of limiting factors:

1. Accessibility - It is easier for an academic to examine a sport program in isolation than to pursue viewer interpretations of the text. As a result, textual analyses, either quantitative or qualitative, have been more prevalent in media research.
2. Behaviourism - The behaviourist assumption that the meaning of the program is fully encapsulated in the text makes surveying audiences unnecessary. As the message ostensibly passes directly from sender to receiver via the text, its meaning for viewers can be reduced by textual analyses or ascertained simply by asking the sender. Related to this line of reasoning is effects research which assumes the meaning of the message is not open to question and the viewer receives it exactly as it was intended by the producer.
3. Critical trends - During the 1970s, cultural studies researchers and others within the critical paradigm used semiological textual analysis to read sports programs. The 1980s witnessed an appreciation of audience readings as processes which reproduced dominant ideology. Researchers recognized the need for an integrated methodology which examined both text and audience.

Research conducted during the 1980s forms the basis of this review section. During this period, effects or behavioral investigations still persisted. For example, Bryant (1989)

suggested that NHL audiences enjoyed viewing sports violence. Gantz (1981) adopted a uses and gratifications approach to assess the motives of college students for viewing sport. "To thrill in victory" topped the list of motives for group viewing. However, unlike critical investigations, these studies did not place meaning-making at the centre of the investigation. The next section will again draw heavily on Turner's (1990) analysis. The focus is on non-sport television viewing because of the paucity of critical research into sports viewing during the 1980s.

Toward the end of the 70s, cultural studies researchers confirmed the limitations of Hall's encoding/decoding model. Individual readings of television programs were not totally predetermined by cultural codes, dominated by accepted codes, or tied to social class. The reading process was more complicated than the model allowed because human agency was an important factor.

Morley (1979) re-established the importance of context in which texts are consumed and the social content brought to them by specific audiences. The interaction between sports programs and viewer presents various possibilities. Readings are not just negotiated or opposed but actively appropriated and transformed. Morley's ideas prompted a series of ethnographic studies. In his analysis of "Nationwide", a British news program, Morley (1980) emphasizes the extra textual determinants of textual meaning (i.e. messages not encoded by the producers which result from cultural and individual experience). The crucial factor in the encounter of audience and text is the range of discourses at the disposal of the viewer (Turner, 1990). Essentially, there must be some points of identification before a viewer can read televised sport programs.

Morley (1979) conducted group interviews to investigate how interpretations were collectively constructed through interaction between participants. He found reading variations among groups but consensus within. However, Morley's findings were questioned because of his methodology. The interviews (which involved viewing parts of a program) were conducted outside the normal context of consumption (i.e. the home). Critics argued that this practice removed a key element from the interaction between television and viewer, the choice to watch in the first place.

Dorothy Hobson (1982) avoided similar criticism by interviewing audiences in their own homes. She investigated both the production and consumption of the popular British soap opera, "Crossroads." Hobson observed the production processes at first hand and discussed the program with families while they watched it at home. This ethnographic approach allowed Hobson to conclude that "Crossroads" producers knew little about their audience and that viewers talked about the program in general terms rather than concentrating on specific episodes.

Morley (1986) responded to criticism of his earlier research by investigating the television readings of eighteen families in the comfort of their own homes. The importance of this research and subsequent work in 1992 are Morley's assertions about analysis. He argues that preference is a textual concept but relevance is a social concept. The viewer takes meanings from television that are relevant to his/her social allegiances at the moment of viewing. Essentially, the criteria for relevance precedes the viewing moment (Turner, 1990). The level of viewer interaction with a program depends on his/her identification with the text.

In Buckingham's (1987) comprehensive analysis of the British soap opera, "East Enders," he interviewed producers, analyzed program text, surveyed program marketing strategies, and interviewed young viewers. Buckingham concurred with Hobson's observation that producers have limited knowledge about the audience they intend to create. Producers stated that they rely on their instincts and intuition when making program decisions.

Buckingham also concedes that textual analyses can only generate reader hypotheses. As viewers bring different kinds of prior knowledge to the program, textual analyses are incapable of accounting for the ways real audiences make sense of television (Turner, 1990). Isolation of the text becomes a problem. Rather than audiences regarding a television program as a discrete, self-contained text, their television viewing may flow, so that boundaries between programs become blurred.

The concept of program flow is important and one which presents special challenges. Gruneau et al. (1988) use program flow (albeit in a different way to Buckingham) to study

sports/television production. Gruneau et al. argue that the representation of a major sporting event such as the Super Bowl within a pre-game/game/post-game program sequence is based on entertainment values. This process is designed to deliver a wider audience than that which normally watches football. Obviously analyses of television sport production, programs, and the public need to be acutely aware of program flow.

The construction of adequate research methodologies remains the big challenge in the 1990s although ethnography has gained in acceptance. Hoijer (1992) suggests that television sport viewing habits vary within different social settings, but a comprehensive investigation of this hypothesis has not been conducted. An ethnographic audience investigation would result in greater understanding of the consumption of television and the meaning-making process (Muir, 1991). It may be that in certain situations, viewers assert their control by playing with the television program and developing meanings quite different from those encoded by the producers (Eastman and Riggs, 1994). Audience interaction with the television text remains a relatively unexplored area.

2.5 Summary

Critical studies and the methodologies they support are invaluable in getting at the ideological core of everyday practices (including television sport). This focus allows researchers to gain insight into the complex processes whereby dominant ideology is sustained in society with the apparent compliance of the majority of citizens.

The analytical units of context, text, and audience interaction are inextricably linked to each other and to the circulation of dominant values in society. The units are good starting points for analyses of television sport and should be examined together (Moores, 1990).

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that most studies have investigated the messages in program texts, some have focused on the constraints of the production context, but very few have examined the meanings constructed by viewers. Analyses of the interaction between two areas such as context and text are also uncommon. These observations provide directions for this paper and future research.

Production context can be investigated by a variety of methods, with the case study approach adopted by Gruneau (1989) seeming to be the most fruitful. Semiologically-based

studies can direct our attention to the signifying systems and the preferred meaning in television sport programs. Analytical categories in a textual analysis are problematic although Gruneau et al. (1988) have provided some useful starting points.

Ethnographic investigations of viewer readings complement context and textual studies. However, the absence of these studies in television sport has resulted in limited understanding of the processes whereby viewers make sense of programs. The decoding moment in the communication circuit is in desperate need of illumination. Studies by Buckingham (1987), Morley (1986), and texts by Deitz, Rus, and Shaffir (1994) and Lindloff (1991) provide sound methodological guidelines for investigations of viewer readings.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

The review of literature identifies deficiencies in the field of television sport research, particularly in the areas of audience decodings and interaction between context, text, and meanings. Consequently, a critical approach is advocated as an appropriate way to investigate these issues because of its focus on analyzing the production and consumption of meaning in society. Research questions one and two in this case study address the issue of context, question three looks at the text, and questions four and five investigate meaning making.

As stated previously, the main premise of this study is that when television sport is encoded in one culture (Australia) and decoded in another culture (Canada), different meanings may result (Eco, 1972). Specifically, the production (or encoding) of the ARF highlights program and its consumption (or decoding) by Canadians is examined. The degree of aberrant decoding or the difference between production moments is discussed after consideration of data obtained from the methods selected. These data collection methods are explained below.

3.2 The Analysis of Context: Personal Interviews and Secondary Sources

To examine why and how the ARF highlights program is produced and marketed a combination of intrusive techniques (interviews) and unobtrusive techniques (archival searches) were used. The interviews helped identify the intentions, practices and priorities of individuals who developed the highlights package. This personal approach also provided insight into the labour and encoding processes of television sport production. On the other hand the archival searches assisted in the collection and verification of information, and to an extent, circumvented the problem of interviewee reaction to the investigator and its impact on dialogue.

The following individuals were interviewed:

1. Grant Burgess - Australian Football League Marketing Manager. Grant was initially interviewed in New York (USA) during February 1994. This initial contact was

followed up by phone interviews in 1995. Grant is involved in the planning, promotion, and management of ARF.

2. Laurie Treloar - Broadcom Australia Production Controller. Laurie was interviewed in Sydney (Australia) during October 1991. He was responsible for overseeing the production and marketing of the highlights package.
3. James Bun - Broadcom Australia Marketing Officer. James was interviewed by phone in November 1993. He worked on the overseas marketing of the highlights program.
4. David Barham - Vuecast Proprietary Limited Executive Producer. David was interviewed by phone in December 1993 and December 1994. He has produced the highlights program since 1990.
5. Joanne McIntosh - The Sports Network Director of Acquisition and Presentation Services. Joanne was interviewed by phone in December 1992, December 1993 and October 1994. She is involved in the acquisition of the highlights program from Prime (USA) ready for telecasting in Canada.
6. Andy Lonsborough - The Canadian Australian Football Association President. Andy was interviewed by phone in October 1994. CAFA organizes a seven-team league in Toronto. The first contact many of their recruits have with ARF is through the highlights program.

The interviews followed a semi-structured approach. An interview guide of 10-12 open-ended questions (see Appendix I) probed the taken for granted and commonsense assumptions used by respondents to guide their everyday practices. For example, eliciting statements by the producer about his general philosophy and editing technique provided insight into subconscious practice. Where permitted, interviews were audio taped and transcripts recording the content, speed, and tone of responses were made. Sometimes it was not only what was said but how it was said that was significant.

Next a descriptive analysis was made from the interview transcripts, which made maximal use of the information generated. This analysis occurred in five stages, each of

which represented a higher level of generality (see McCraken, 1988: 43). For each interview transcript:

1. Each sentence in the transcript was examined on its own terms. Relationships to other aspects of the text were ignored. (An observation for each sentence was created.)
2. These observations were developed by themselves, then in accordance with other evidence in the transcript, and then according to previous literature.
3. The interconnections between stage two observations were examined in light of previous literature.
4. Observations from previous stages were then subjected to collective scrutiny. This determined patterns of inter-theme consistency and contradiction.
5. Patterns and themes appearing in the interviews were subjected to a final process of analysis. Specific responses were organized into general answers to the question of why and how the highlights program is produced and marketed.

By progressing from the particular to the general, a broader picture of the encoding process was achieved and its positioning within the political/economic context clarified.

Numerous publications from a variety of sources were examined in the study. Following is a sample of those considered:

1. Commercial media accounts - Various periodical and newspaper articles whose titles include:
   - O'Regan, T. (1991) The rise and fall of entrepreneurial TV: Australian TV 1986-90.
   - Smith, P. (1994, February 21) Pace of change leaves football panting.

   Books such as:
   - Stewart, R.K. (1983) *The Australian Football Business*;
   - Stoddart, B. (1986) *Saturday Afternoon Fever*;
2. Official documentary records including:
   - AFL Annual Reports (1989-1993)
   - AFL Marketing Plan (August 15, 1994)

3.3 The Analysis of Text: Semiotics

After investigating the encoding process and defining the producer's understanding of the highlights program, the focus moved to the text itself. A semiotic analysis was used to generate hypotheses about how viewers understand the program. It was previously pointed out that although semiotics direct us to preferred readings of the program, it cannot account for the ways real audiences make sense of the highlights package (Buckingham, 1987). Throughout the circuit of production, a consensus about what the program represents and what it says to the viewer does not exist.

Semiotics enable the researcher to look beyond the manifest content of the text to the latent or unspoken meanings signified by the program. Messages and meanings are not only denoted by explicit content but also signified (or connotated) by images and sounds. The television text is associated by the viewer with a variety of concepts which may have a very visceral effect.

The review of literature drew attention to three fundamental drawbacks of quantitative analyses of manifest content: 1. The separation of a sportscast into discrete components for statistical analyses is problematic, 2. There is an assumption that numerical presence is directly proportional to audience impact, and 3. Quantitative analyses are unable to deal with the connotative aspects of television text. In light of these deficiencies, a qualitative analysis of both manifest and latent content is desirable.

One program highlighting week twenty of the 1992 AFL season was analyzed semiotically. This program was selected because it is typical of the ARF highlight programs telecast by TSN over the last five years. During each of 1993, 1994, and 1995 only four different programs featuring the finals series was telecast in Canada. These programs summarized a maximum of only four games versus the seven games highlighted in earlier shows. Because the degree of mediation is greater in the seven-game programs, they were of greater interest to this study.

Since 1992, neither the program format nor the game of ARF has changed significantly. As a result, the analysis of a slightly dated script is relevant in 1995. The slight changes in format over the last five years are discussed.

The running time of the program is approximately 50 minutes, but for this study it is edited down to 30.5 minutes to facilitate analysis. An actual game segment of approximately 20 minutes is taken out, but a 22 minute game sequence remains. This editing eliminates unnecessary duplication during the semiotic investigation. Another advantage of the reduction is that in the next phase of the research, which involved focus groups, participants needed only view the 30.5 minute version rather than the full 50 minutes. To maximize discussion time in the 90 minute focus groups, observation of television texts should be less than 50% of the total time (Morgan, 1988). Analytical accuracy is not greatly affected, because the viewed segments contain the main components of the highlights program. However, one could claim that this second level of selection changed the nature of the encoded message; this was not borne out in the analysis.

For analytical purposes, the 30.5 minute segment was divided into three major syntagmatic elements. These were the pre-game introduction (4.5 minutes), game play (22.5 minutes), and the post-game wrap-up, (3.5 minutes). In turn, these elements were separated into a number of episodes, each with their own syntagmatic structure (see syntagmatic structure in Appendix II). The visual and auditory dimensions of each episode were then defined.

For example, the first episode in the pre-game introduction included a montage of 35 action shots in the space of 47 seconds (1.3 shots/second). The auditory dimension of this episode included elements of narrative, music, and international (natural) sound. These elements contain signs which are units of meaning (for example, didgeridoo music signifies native Australia. Important aspects of the auditory dimension were described in relation to the visual dimension. As indicated previously attention was paid to the anchoring effects of commentary.

Some shot-by-shot description was attempted, but the significant elements of framing, editing, and graphics were the prime focus (see visual codes and analysis in Appendix II). Signs within these elements, such as close-ups signifying personalization, were discussed (see the semiotic vocabulary list in Appendix II.)

Finally, the episode's syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic categories that constitute it were examined. This analytic stage involves decoding the meanings and messages suggested by the episode. The ordered combination of audio and visual signs (syntagmatic structure) produces certain messages which were highlighted.

3.4 The Analysis of Audience Interaction: Focus Groups and Interviews

The investigation of audience interaction with the highlights program used interview and focus group methods. Interviews of all the major stakeholders in the program (see Appendix I) provided insight into not only the context of production, but also the role of TSN in the audience interaction with the highlights program. As TSN is the medium which brings Canadians in contact with the show, it helps shape the messages that are decoded. The series of interviews with Joanne McIntosh, TSN's Director of Acquisition and Presentation Services, was most useful in clarifying not only why TSN telecasts the highlights program and what their perceptions of the show are, but also the whole audience meaning-making process.

Focus groups were used to examine more directly the program/viewer encounter or the decoding moment. This research method provided a viable alternative to the standard survey vs. experiments vs. observations vs. interviews mix. The origins of focus group methodology can be traced to Lazarsfeld's work in 1941 where he tested responses to American moralistic radio programs (Merton, 1987). In 1956, Merton, Fiske and Kendall produced a text on focused interview technique. During the 1960s and 70s market researchers used the technique to evaluate consumer purchasing decisions. Then in the late 1970s and 1980s, focus groups were used more frequently for sociological investigations. For example, Morgan and Spanish (1984) studied how people think about the prevention of heart attacks and Knoedel (1988) examined family planning decisions. From its behaviourist beginnings, focus group methodology has evolved into a useful sociological research tool, one which was appropriate for this exploratory analysis.

Focus groups provided this analysis with the following advantages:

1. They combined the control of an interview with the group interaction of participant observation. The interaction concentrated on the highlights program and ARF which

were central to this study. Focusing the group discussion on these topics elicited responses that may not have been expressed either in the participants' own casual conversations or in response to structured questioning.

2. Topics were explored that participants rarely think deeply about. Taken-for-granted or common sense assumptions about ARF were examined. For most Canadians, ARF has little relevance to their daily lives.

3. The methodology was employed relatively inexpensively and quickly. In comparison to interview and participant observation techniques, focus groups were more cost and time efficient.

Steps by step recipes exist for market-based focus group research (Greenbaum, 1993). However, Morgan and Spanish (1984), drawing on work from Fern (1982), conclude there is nothing sacred (or even necessarily correct) about the way focus groups are currently used in market research. There is also only limited consensus on how to conduct sociologically-oriented focus groups. As a result, the methodology used in this study was a hybrid of market and sociological applications. The following eclectic list of parameters formed the framework of the ARF focus groups:

1. Minigroup size - four to six participants.
2. Group duration - 100 minutes.
3. Number of groups - five.
4. Group composition - homogeneous (i.e., single sex), age range (15 years maximum), unknown to one another.
5. Other characteristics - participants were aware of the product but <u>not</u> regular users, they also wanted to participate in the focus group. (Parameters adopted from marketing, Greenbaum, 1993.)
6. Questions - a guide of four to five topics was used which contained 12 questions maximum and moved from general to specific. As moderator I did not provide potential responses for participants, and there was an emphasis on "how" and "why" questions.
7. Moderator - this was myself. I both moderated and interviewed.

8. Location - the groups were conducted in my home because it was convenient, comfortable, and functional. I used a U-shaped furniture arrangement with tables for participants.
9. Recording - audio taping was used because it is less intrusive than videotaping.
10. Procedures and analysis - these are detailed in Appendix III. How the focus groups were used to illuminate the meaning-making process is also outlined in this appendix (parameters from sociological research, Morgan, 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).

This study of encoding and decoding processes concludes with a discussion of differences between the Australian producers' understanding and Canadian audience interpretations of the highlights program. The degree of aberrance between the encoding and decoding moments in the circuit of production of meaning is the main focus.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Why is the ARF highlights program produced for overseas audiences?

> Yeah, it's a little bit like what comes first. Do you finance it on the basis that it will increase viewership of the program and therefore sponsorship and therefore income or do we say let's make a quid out of it first and then put money back into it?
>
> (Grant Burgess, AFL Marketing Manager, 1994)

There is no doubt that the ARF highlights program's prime function is to provide revenue for the AFL. Like many independent, self-supporting organizations, the AFL seeks new markets for its product and alternative sources of income to finance current operations and future growth. The highlights program is a successful marketing vehicle targeted toward overseas consumers and generates hundreds of thousands of dollars for the AFL. Australian Rules Football has established a visible presence within both television and entertainment industries overseas, and the AFL is keen to exploit the financial opportunities presented by this market positioning.

While seemingly preoccupied with the business of sports and the reinvestment of profits into football, the AFL also has important non-commercial interests. In a 1994 mission statement, the AFL defined its responsibilities. The Australian Football League exists to:

- Develop and manage the AFL competition to ensure it is Australia's most successful national sports competition in the entertainment industry.
- Maximize the economic, cultural and social benefits of Australian Football to its member clubs, the players, the football fraternity and the community at large.
- Promote and develop participation and support for Australian Football throughout Australia and overseas.
- Foster good citizenship, both on and off the play field (AFL Marketing Plan, 1994: 9).

Maintaining the viability of the domestic competition is the highest priority, but the AFL is also committed to fostering the growth of the game overseas. For most non-Australians, their first contact with ARF is via the televised highlights program. If this encounter is a positive one, viewers may watch the show on a regular basis and a few may even attempt to participate in the sport. The highlights program assists in the formation of a cultural connection between ARF and an international audience.

However, short-term profit, promotion, and participation are simplistic justifications for the production of the program. The economic and political context of the program's origin needs to be investigated to fully explain why the program is made. Although the highlight show was first telecast in 1990, the roots of its existence can be traced back thirty years to the beginning of television in Australia. These origins and the historical development of the ARF Television relationship are now discussed with particular emphasis on important events in the 1980s which culminated in the highlight program's production. A comprehensive analysis by Lekakis (1987), informs this section.

4.1.1. The 1950s and 60s: The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship

> A 1959 Australian magazine article proclaimed televised sports popularity:
>
> What are the most popular programs? Mickey Mouse, Clint Walker, Gunsmoke. . . . Sport particularly seems to be the program for which TV was invented, (cited in Sandercock and Turner, 1981: 149)

The Australian Football League (formerly the Victorian Football League from 1896-1990) has always been an aggressive competitor in the Australian television entertainment industry. In response to the rival Victorian Football Association (VFA) securing Melbourne's first television sport contract in 1957, the VFL countered with their own agreement in the same year. The electronic media coverage was an immediate success, with both viewer ratings and game attendances achieving record levels (Sandercock and Turner, 1981). The VFL was able to consolidate its position as the premier winter sport in Victoria while the VFA languished in second position.

Because of the influx of postwar European immigrants, soccer was also threatening VFL supremacy during the 1950s. Traditional VFL inner-city strongholds such as

Collingwood and Carlton experienced a doubling in their migrant populations. The televising of ARF proved successful in gaining some immigrant converts and heading off the soccer challenge (Sandercock and Turner, 1981). Through decisive action, the VFL was able to exploit the introduction of television to Australia by expanding its fan base.

Fledgling television stations also profited from their relationship with football. Similar to American experiences, popular football programming attracted large audiences who in turn were sold commodity-like to advertisers by television stations to generate income. This commodity-producing logic is the core of commercial television's business activity. In fact, football programming was a cash cow, as evidenced by the three Melbourne television stations (HSV-7, GTV-9, and ABC-2) quickly meeting the VFL demands for a tripling of broadcast fees in 1958 (Sandercock and Turner, 1981). Clearly the VFL recognized the income potential of television and was not about to undersell their quality football product.

During the 1960s, four television stations (including ATV-0) actively bid for VFL game rights and developed football-related programming. Audiences for these shows grew significantly, thus strengthening the commercial bond between football, broadcast television, and advertisers. While television revenues increased, gate receipts and club memberships still accounted for the bulk of VFL income. Advertising revenues and sponsorships directly accrued to the television stations because the VFL lacked the initiative and expertise to handle such affairs. VFL players and officials were part-time amateurs who were more concerned with winning the Grand Final and covering operational costs than demanding large salaries. These priorities were symbolized by the traditional Aussie chook raffle which was still a part of club fund raising. Raffling chickens in pubs on Friday afternoons reflects the sophistication level of typical club management at that time.

4.1.2. The 1970s: A Period of Change

Developments during the 1970s dramatically and permanently bonded the interests of the VFL, television stations, and corporate advertisers. Three key areas of change are identified by Lekakis (1987).

(1) an intensification of "on-field" and "off-field" competition between VFL clubs,

(2) technical innovations to television coverage of sport, and

(3) legal reforms to the advertising industry.

Three "isms", professionalism, commercialism, and specialism, symbolized the challenge to traditional VFL values.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the viability of the VFL appeared rosy. There was parity in the league, with seven different teams winning the premiership during the decade and gate receipts continuing to soar. But a sudden decline in game attendance during 1968 forced the VFL to re-evaluate their position. The downturn came at a time when football-saturated Saturday television had all stations covering the competition. It was time for the VFL to make their product more exclusive and force the successful television bidders to pay more for the privilege of broadcasting football. By 1970, only HSV-7 and ABC-2 continued to vie for telecast rights.

4.1.3. The Competition Heats Up

When North Melbourne's blank cheque policy effectively bought them their first premiership in 1975, other football clubs decided to follow North's lead. After restructuring their administration, which saw a new president and nine new executive positions created, North Melbourne vigorously raised revenue to buy marquee players. Some of the club's creative income generators included a disco, travel agency, and finance company, but the most ambitious project was the sponsor's group (Stewart, cited in Lekakis, 1987). This organization forged links between North Melbourne and 50 local businesses. In return for sponsoring players, members of the group received recognition on television and the club's sponsor board and exclusive use of their products or services by North Melbourne.

With the growing sophistication of club administrations came an increase in operating costs and a demand for star players. The market values of champion players sky rocketed to the extent that between 1972 and 1978 the average annual player costs per club climbed from approximately A$50,000 to A$290,000. By 1975, average game payment per player exceeded the average weekly wage of the Australian public (VFL report, 1985). Not

only had some clubs charged down the path to professionalism but unwittingly slid toward financial ruin. Generous corporate sponsorships including that of league patrons, W.D. and H.O. Wills Tobacco Company, could not keep pace with player payments and administration costs.

4.1.4. Television to the Rescue

During the early 1970s, the VFL experimented with a variety of rule changes specifically designed to make ARF more appealing to live spectators and television viewers. The awarding of a free kick when a ball was kicked out of bounds on the fall prevented time wasting and increased the speed of the game. The centre square rule permitted only four players from each team to be inside a 45-metre square at the centre bounce, thus reducing player congestion. Lastly, the final five playoff formats replaced the final four, thereby extending the finals series by three matches and making it more attractive to television advertisers because of the added exposure. All three rule changes resulted in a more entertaining football product which attracted more consumers.

Football's appeal was further enhanced by the introduction of colour television to Australia in 1975. Advertisers believed that colour programming increased viewer attention, captured the aesthetic qualities of real life, accentuated the entertainment value of television, and stimulated the purchase of more television sets (Goldlust, 1987). VFL coverage could now attract entertainment-oriented as well as sport-oriented audiences, thereby increasing the market reached by television advertising. Demand for 30-second ad slots during the match of the day soared (Sandercock and Turner, 1981).

Some of the companies advertising during football programming also sponsored individual clubs. The execution by clubs of their "colourful" marketing plans resulted in an increase in both advertising and sponsorship allocations. By combining the exposure they received directly in television ads with the incidental signage they received in football telecasts, companies hoped to have their names and logos entrenched in viewers' minds. Football again benefitted from its association with television because sponsors saw the game as a vehicle to reach potential customers. Corporate patrons rarely have a purely emotional attachment to sport; they strive for mutually beneficial business relationships.

Finally, slow-motion replays became an integral part of telecasts. This technical innovation highlighted important passages of play, enabled the quasi-scientific analysis of action by commentators, and complemented the presentation of advertisements. By cutting from a spectacular goal to an ad and back for a replay of the highlight, producers maintained excitement and program flow while advertisers were guaranteed an upbeat introduction to their product. Slow-motion replays amplified the entertainment and advertising value of football telecasts.

4.1.5. Advertising Reform

Part of the platform upon which the Whitlam Labour government was swept into power in 1972 was a promise to ban direct television advertising of tobacco products. The ban was formally legislated in 1975, but by this time tobacco companies had positioned themselves to profit from the change. A popular strategy was to divert money into the sponsorship of televised sports so that tobacco signage was prominent at stadiums, sports events, and media interviews. The competition for VFL sponsorship rights between tobacco companies was fierce, with W.D. and H.O. Wills and the Philip Morris Company being particularly active. In 1976, Philip Morris outbid Wills and pledged A$100,000 for the right to advertise at all televised VFL venues, have their products featured in football publications, and obtain prominent signage at televised awards presentations. The VFL became a major beneficiary of the government ban on tobacco advertising.

The business relationship between the VFL, television and corporate groups continued to develop during the mid and late 70s, but not without problems. As advertising rates and revenue increased, so did the sale of television rights--but at a disproportionate rate. While HSV-7 charged A$1,500 for a minute commercial during Saturday night football replays and earned over A$1.5 million for advertising during football programming in 1977, they paid only A$400,000 to the VFL for the television rights. The league reacted by negotiating the rights to Saturday replays and Tuesday night matches on a separate basis. This decision netted the VFL an extra A$300,000 (Sandercock and Turner, 1981).

In another attempt to increase control of its product, the VFL introduced an official logo which appeared on all objects related to the game including jerseys, scoreboards, and

television graphics. When the league signed agreements for the production of officially licensed products, they envisioned not only public recognition of the logo but substantial revenues. Soon a mixed collection of breads, pies, cereals, clothing, insurance, and travel companies featured the VFL logo. While the VFL had more control over their product, they now required some visionary direction to their business ventures.

In 1976/77, as part of VFL restructuring, a property's division was formed to coordinate licensing, a media and corporate planning division took on additional specialized personnel, and Dr. Alan Aylett and Jack Hamilton took over as president and general manager of the league. These two individuals are credited with making ARF one of Victoria's fastest growing industries by strengthening links with business and the media.

Individual clubs were encouraged to organize their own sponsorship deals but on a smaller scale to the VFL's. Jerseys, training outfits, and advertising boards carried team logos and the importance of sponsorship income was reflected in the number of prominent businessmen who became club presidents and administrators. As a result of this entrepreneurial drive, the average club non-football revenue more than doubled as a proportion of total income from 1974 to 1978 (Stewart, 1983). Sponsorships became an integral part of club budgets.

This financial expansion both liberated and constrained the VFL. The governing body now had the means to develop football, but the individual clubs had to conduct player negotiations in a bull market. Because of escalating player salaries, operating costs soared and clubs such as South Melbourne and Fitzroy plunged into debt. The path to the premiership now led through big business whose main interest was not always football. While it was important for both businesses and clubs to have a competitive team on the field, their priorities were often very different.

Entering the 1980s, any comparative advantage the VFL had enjoyed over other pro sports was quickly being eroded by spiralling club debt. The league had to resolve its financial crisis while remaining well positioned to take advantage of television agreements first negotiated in the 1960s and business deals forged during the 1970s.

4.1.6. The 1980s: The Football Revolution

During this decade, the VFL continued its commercial expansion, culminating in the formation of a national competition and increased international exposure. While television and business were instrumental in this expansion process, they presented the VFL with numerous dilemmas and conflicts. The VFL assumed a proactive rather than a reactive role in its negotiations with football stakeholders in order to achieve its competitive, financial, and promotional objectives.

Balancing progressive commercial ventures with traditional club values proved to be a major stumbling block. The VFL was perceived as pandering to the wishes of business and television rather than remaining loyal to football club traditions. For example, in return for committing A$1 million to the Tuesday night competition, The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd. received competition naming rights while the games were rescheduled so they could be played during television prime time (Sandercock and Turner, 1981). This accommodative behaviour drew criticism from Collingwood Club President John Hickey, who accused the VFL of "turning the Television set into an alternative grandstand" (The Age, cited in Lekakis, 1987). However, it was clear to the VFL that their future was within the television-entertainment industry because the revenue provided was invaluable in financing ground improvements, subsidizing admission prices, and providing competition prize money (Sandercock and Turner, 1981). A symbiotic relationship between the VFL and television had developed which was threatening to individual football clubs.

HSV-7 continued to be the television home of ARF during the 1980s. In return for downplaying incidents considered detrimental to the game and providing clubs with unlimited free videotapes of matches, HSV-7 received an ongoing commitment from VFL players and coaches to attend television interviews and promotions. This access to players was the result of a VFL directive rather than an act of goodwill by football clubs. Traditional club administrators did not agree with the direction the league was taking.

Events came to a head in 1982 with the relocation of South Melbourne to Sydney. HSV-7 had received positive feedback from its test marketing of Australian Rules telecasts in Sydney. To rescue the debt-ridden South Melbourne club, the VFL decided to move the

team to Sydney. This relocation raised the hackles of South Melbourne's supporters who unsuccessfully campaigned to keep the team in Melbourne on the basis of its long-standing community ties. Although relocation costs were expensive, the VFL justified the venture on the basis of the anticipated increase in television and sponsorship revenue. It made good business sense to reduce the league's dependence on the Melbourne market and expand into Sydney, Australia's largest television market.

The move to Sydney was also significant because it represented a tangible threat to Australia's other professional football code, rugby league. Rugby league is an off-shoot from rugby. It has been said that Melbourne and Sydney are two cities separated by a different football code. In Sydney, rugby league enjoy strong community support and has developed into a popular, professional sport with its own expansionist agenda. One significant advantage Sydney clubs enjoyed over Melbourne clubs until 1994 was that gambling revenues from poker (slot) machines covered operating costs. Spiralling debt was not a problem, but the intrusion of a Melbourne Australian Rules football club into the lucrative Sydney market was cause for some concern among rugby league officials.

The institution of a five-man commission in 1984 as the governing body of the VFL further strained relationships between the VFL and member clubs. It was interpreted by poorer clubs as an attempt to squeeze them out of the competition, because the independent commission had the power to impose financial standards in club accounting and expel clubs from the competition (VFL Report, 1985). The drive for national competition and exposure appeared to take precedence over the VFL's traditional responsibility for its constituent clubs. However, with five of the twelve VFL clubs operating at a loss, the commission was established to ensure the long-term viability of the whole competition, not necessarily to rescue individual clubs. A professional league located almost entirely within Melbourne was seen by the commission as being doomed to failure.

In 1985, the commission advised clubs that existing broadcast fees amounting to A$4 million could not be increased without the inclusion of teams from cities such as Perth, Adelaide, and Brisbane (VFL Report, 1985). With television stations attempting to establish national networks by coordinating regional stations, it was technically feasible for HSV-7

to provide direct telecasts of interstate matches to prime-time Melbourne audiences on Monday nights. This arrangement was potentially worth over A$1.5 million to the VFL and would provide HSV-7 with relatively low cost Australian content programming through which they could deliver national audiences to advertisers. As sport programming was seven times less expensive to produce than local drama (Bonney, 1983), it was profitable for HSV-7 to cover professional football on a national level.

Securing broadcast revenues was not the only means by which the VFL hoped to reduce club debt. Both the introduction of a player draft in 1983 and the establishment of a salary cap in 1985 aided in reducing club costs. As a result of a sponsorship drive, Carlton and United Breweries (maker of Foster's) became the VFL's corporate sponsor in 1986 and club sponsorships increased to between A$200,000 and A$300,000 as compared to the A$100,000 average in 1980 (The Age, cited in Lekakis, 1987). Furthermore, private ownership restrictions were lifted by the VFL in 1985 to allow the purchase of the debt-ridden Sydney Swans (formerly South Melbourne) by Dr. Edelsten for A$6.3 million. Despite these innovative measures, seven of twelve clubs operated at a loss in 1986. These circumstances made the establishment of a national competition with national television coverage even more imperative.

Finally, in 1987, a national competition was created with the addition of teams from Perth and Brisbane to the Melbourne and Sydney-based clubs. Perth had long been an Australian Rules stronghold, but a blackout rule had applied to live Saturday telecasts of VFL matches in that city. A Perth-based team could now exploit that untapped televised football market. By contrast, a team was set up in Brisbane (hardly a football stronghold) purely to establish a national ARF presence. Not only did the rugby league reign supreme in Brisbane, but the television market was only moderate in size. The new club was owned by an optimistic group of entrepreneurs with deep pockets.

Unfortunately for the VFL, the establishment of the national competition after years of negotiations and lobbying coincided with a financial crisis in the Australian television industry. The ownership of HSV-7, the VFL's main television ally, was in a state of flux because of corporate raids. These were the direct result of two unrelated governmental

decisions. The first was the deregulation of the Australian financial sector which fuelled an investment boom, and the second was the government's decision to change television ownership rules and introduce more television access to regional Australia (O'Regan, 1991). While the VFL was no stranger to liquidity problems, Australian television, on the other hand, was accustomed to high profits and minimal debts. How this situation dramatically changed is discussed because it impacted future VFL decisions. Until 1987, the VFL had placed the viability of the national competition firmly in the hands of Australian network television.

4.1.7. The Revaluing of Australian Television

Prior to 1987, the largest television market share one company could own was 43%. This was increased to 60%, but new cross-media regulations restricted common television ownership in a certain geographical market. The new legislation was in response to the proposed equalization plan by commercial television whereby adjacent regional television markets along the eastern seaboard would be combined into four large markets. This market aggregation, along with the launch of the AUSSAT satellite which facilitated simultaneous programming and the networking of program schedules, would offer the chance to receive additional revenues from national advertising. The balance of power in national advertising would move from ad agencies to television networks (O'Regan, 1991).

Companies quickly readjusted their media portfolio to meet the new ownership requirements, and the value of television stock boomed as entrepreneurial groups rushed to take control of 60% of the Australian television market. The grossly inflated prices paid for television stations was also a function of the availability of easy credit from Australian banks and the business logic of corporate raiders. Using debt financing, raiders would buy assets, strip them of profitable companies, revalue the remaining asset upwards, and use that revalued asset to borrow against for additional purchases. Financial deregulation allowed these high-risk, low equity, business practises to exploit and boost Australian television ownership during the late 1980s.

HSV-7, the VFL's broadcaster, along with other stations in the 7 network, was purchased by a corporate raider (the Quintex Group) for US$49 per viewer (Bock, cited in

O'Regan, 1991). (Interestingly, this company also bought the cash poor Brisbane Australian Rules Football Club.) Quintex was a high profile company, controlled by the flamboyant Christopher Skase, who was able to revalue the 7 network because of the booming share and property market. Also, as a result of Australia's lax company and securities laws and limited legal sanction, Quintex's creative accountants projected a 1987/88 profit after tax higher than profit before tax without fear of a penalty. Through dubious business practices, the book value of HSV-7 ranked it among the most valuable television stations in the world.

4.1.8. The Broadcom Deal

In light of this sudden media shakeup, Channel 7's uncertain future, and collusion among television networks about sport coverage, the VFL took steps in December 1986 to protect its product from fluctuations in the Australian television market. The commission signed a six-year, A$24.5 million deal with Broadcom Australia Ltd. (a Sydney-based television production and packaging company) to act as the VFL's agent. By retaining domestic and international television rights, Broadcom effectively replaced HSV-7 as the home of ARF. The new deal altered the relative bargaining position of television stations in the rights negotiation process. As Grant Burgess, AFL Market Manager explains, the deal came about because of an unofficial agreement between the television networks in Australia.

> As we understand it, it was basically a keep-off-the-grass arrangement and we had to try and break that to generate the sort of revenue from television or that which we believed we should be able to. Broadcom was able to do that for us because they were a wholesaler. They in turn could sell these rights and that's what they did (Burgess, 1994).

HSV-7 had a profitable advertising vehicle wrenched from its control by the VFL who believed that what 7 were paying for the television rights pre-Broadcom was not true market value. "We had to somehow bid that up and Broadcom was the vehicle to do that" (Burgess, 1994). Channel 7 responded to this move by refusing to deal with Broadcom, thereby allowing ABC-2 to secure the 1987 domestic television football rights.

As the VFL commission lacked the time and expertise, Broadcom was also responsible for maintaining uniform high standards in the technical presentation of football

and marketing the new national competition both within Australia and overseas. While the domestic market remained the main priority, overseas opportunities were being explored for their commercial value. Football programming first shown in the U.S. in 1975 was extended by a new contract with ESPN and exhibition matches were played in Vancouver, London, and Tokyo; but a more extensive and coordinated approach was needed to generate income for the VFL.

After the 1987 season, the VFL renegotiated its contract with Broadcom, thereby allowing HSV-7 to deal directly with the league. Broadcom had served its purpose, because Channel 7 no longer took its football contract for granted. The station paid a premium price (A$4.5 million per year) to secure domestic broadcasting rights for the next five years; Broadcom retained the international football rights. Astute negotiations had yielded the VFL a seemingly guaranteed income source for six years in an unstable financial environment. Channel 7 could generate advertising revenue from a national football competition telecast live throughout an extensive network. The future looked promising.

4.1.9. Financial Chaos

Buoyed by revenue gains and the prospect of celebrating the nation's 200th birthday, Australia's football and television industries entered 1988 with a false sense of security. Both were carrying significant debts which, if not reduced, could adversely affect the commercial viability of each industry. Although AFL operating income had increased approximately A$3.5 million from 1986 to 1988, and the financial records of Victorian-based clubs had improved from a combined operating deficit of more than A$3 million in 1986 to a 1988 net surplus of around A$75000, VFL debt stood at A$14.4 million and club debt at A$6.8 million (VFL Annual Report, 1989). Clubs such as Fitzroy, Footscray, St. Kilda, and the interstate clubs of Sydney and Brisbane were in financial trouble. Channel 7's proprietor, Quintex, faced substantial interest bills, stiff competition for advertising contracts from other television owners, and hundreds of millions of dollars in debts. Decisive action was required by both the VFL and Quintex.

To achieve financial stability into the 1990s, the VFL proposed converting privately owned clubs (i.e. Sydney and Brisbane) to member-based structures, prohibiting the buying

and selling of players for cash, reducing player list sizes (from 100 to 42), generally maximizing the competition's net revenue generation, and improving the total debt to a surplus ratio (AFL Marketing Plan, 1994). Also, the VFL reconfirmed its commitment to making equalization payments to clubs to help bridge the gap between financially strong and weak teams.

On the other hand, Quintex continued to pursue communication assets, including United Artists in America, based on the property development philosophy that values need not reflect cash flow and profit levels to enjoy future capital gains. Quintex's boss, Christopher Skase, was so intent on achieving a global communication empire that he ignored both the differences between intangible and physical assets and the company's spiralling debt. The combination of this oversight and Network 7's inability to register significant profits because of a crowded advertising market, simultaneous programming problems, and regional networking costs, contributed to Quintex's demise. Unfortunately, in 1989, the Quintex group of companies, owing a massive A$1.4 billion, were forced to place Network 7 into receivership (Sutton, cited in O'Regan, 1991).

This collapse sent shockwaves through the VFL, who were in the middle of a five-year deal with Channel 7, the network responsible for telecasting football nationwide. While 7's receivers honoured all existing contracts, it was clear to the VFL that alternate sources of income needed to be maximized to help offset the impact of unexpected events. Commercial sponsorships, licensing agreements, endorsements, and club memberships were pursued with renewed vigour as well as the relatively untapped international market. Broadcom, which owned football's international television rights, developed a weekly highlights program to serve as the main marketing vehicle overseas. Not only could the sale of this program raise revenue, it could attract licencing business and promote ARF to foreigners at the same time.

4.1.10. The 90s Revival

Promoting and developing participation and support for ARF overseas had been a secondary, but nevertheless long-standing aim, of the VFL. However, until 1989/90, marketing efforts had been *ad hoc* with football videotapes distributed periodically to

companies such as ESPN in America, Channel 4 in England, and Fuji Television in Japan. In 1989, the grand final, which is the culmination of the football season, was viewed by an estimated 85 million people worldwide; but nowhere outside of Australia could Australian Rules be seen on a regular basis. Producing a weekly highlights package tailored for an international market gave football regular exposure, more income, and introduced two key name changes. To reflect the establishment of a national competition, the Victorian Football League (VFL) became the Australian Football League (AFL); Australian Rules Football officially became Australian Football. The game now had a new global identity.

When the first highlights program was telecast in March 1990, it held the attention of viewers who had never seen Australian Football. As producers and marketers of the program, Broadcom realized the importance of the initial audience encounter and designed a program which was both entertaining and informative. Although the narration was translated into different languages, the visual presentation was identical throughout the world. In Canada, The Sports Network (TSN) telecast the weekly highlights programs from the first one in March to the grand final in October, securing a small market niche. As the AFL's primary marketing vehicle overseas, the low-budget highlights program was expected to earn much needed revenue, attract licensing business, and achieve the recognition of and participation in Australian football throughout the world. This was a tall order for any television program in its first year of production.

Since 1990, the highlights program has enjoyed moderate success as the AFL's most visible international marketing vehicle. Yearly television contracts throughout the world have, for the most part, been renewed. TSN continues to purchase programs, albeit a reduced number, from Prime International who have the North American television rights for AFL programming. Canadian viewership remains limited, with a top rating of 42,000 viewers for the preliminary final program in 1994. As the program's advertising value remains low in Canada and other countries, the show has not provided the AFL with the revenue they require. After 1994's review of the marketing and distribution of the highlights program, the AFL decided to take over the promotional responsibilities from Broadcom. This effectively severed ties between the AFL and Broadcom, because Vuecast took over the production of

the program in 1992. In an effort to maximize revenues, the AFL decided to take a more comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to marketing the highlights program.

Where the program has been most successful is in the promotion of participation in the game. Primarily as the result of television exposure and dedicated fans, leagues have been set up in the USA, England, Japan, Denmark, and Canada. While receiving limited AFL assistance, a seven-team league has thrived in the Toronto area since 1989. Eighty percent of the players are Canadian, many of whom first viewed the game on TSN and decided they would like to participate in the sport. The biggest selling point appears to be the game itself with its free-flowing, athletic style, roughness and quick scoring.

1994/95 ushered in a new era where ARF "has been restructured like no other time in its history" (Smith, 1994). The list of changes included an expanded AFL commission with greater powers, a final eight finals system, three interchange players, agreement on the admission of a 16th club (probably Port Adelaide), advertising on shorts and the back of football jerseys, and average player salaries exceeding A$60,000 for the first time. However, the AFL continued to contend with an unstable domestic television industry where media moguls and the newly formed cable companies of Foxtel and Optus Vision squared off against one another. The 7 Network valued at over A$1 billion, had been pulled out of receivership by a public share listing, but Foxtel and Optus vigorously sought access to 7's booty of AFL, Australian Rugby Union, Atlanta, and Sydney Olympic television rights. Foxtel looked to have an agreement sewn up because its owner, News Corporation Ltd. headed by Rupert Murdoch, also owned 12% of 7. A former News Corp. employee, Kerry Stokes, owned 12% (and later 17%) of the network. Surprisingly it was Optus Vision, backed by Australian media mogul Kerry Packer and the giant American-based company Cablevision, which secured a lucrative pay TV alliance with Channel 7. While delivering a stunning blow to Foxtel, this alliance represents medium-term security for both Channel 7 and the AFL.

In an agreement signed in April (1995), the 7 Network sold the AFL pay-television rights to Optus Vision. The AFL are currently negotiating an A$180 million deal with the 7 Network for free-to-air and pay-television rights for 1999 to 2003. While this is an

extension of the present contract between the league and 7, which expires at the end of 1998 it more importantly represents a doubling of television revenues. It would be the biggest deal in Australian sporting history (Jones and Linnell, 1995). With the AFL seemingly locked in an extended relationship with 7 and Optus, it does not preclude the possibility of raids by Foxtel. A cable war is raging in Australia and, as a recent article points out, the stakes are high,

> With the two pay TV syndicates committed to $7 billion in spending over the next five years, a potential market of only six million households and a likely take-up rate for pay TV over the next five years of no more than 20% that number, the two rivals realize there is room for only one operator. The group that secures the best programs and gets its cable laid quickest will survive, (The Weekend Australian, May 6-7, 1995).

The real winners in all this may be popular sports such as Australian Rules Football. With television rights such a valuable commodity, the future for football programming including the highlights packages and indeed the AFL looks promising. The financial problems endemic in the 1980's are slowly dissolving, and football has a prime opportunity to capitalize on gains made both domestically and internationally.

4.1.11. Summary

While the development of football in Australia has been and always will be the main priority of the AFL, the league does have an interest in overseas promotion. This interest is commercially driven, because the AFL seeks to increase television revenue and decrease competition debt which has accumulated over the last decade to a 1993 total of A$34.3 million (AFL Marketing Plan, 1994). Achieving recognition of and participation in Australian football abroad are relatively minor aims of overseas marketing. Maintaining the financial viability of the domestic competition shapes all AFL actions, including the decision to contract Broadcom to produce an international highlights program. Any other benefits which accrue to the AFL because of their business decisions is a welcome bonus.

The origin of the AFL's commercial development can be traced back to 1957 when football was first telecast in Australia. After some initial hesitation, AFL administrators soon

realized that television was an important tool in gaining a competitive edge over other leagues and sports. The AFL were players in both the football and entertainment industries and as such were influenced by factors affecting both enterprises. Political factors such as changes in government policy and economic factors such as recessions and the accumulation of debt affected the television entertainment industry, which in turn impacted the AFL. The league had to develop an infrastructure and strategies to contend with all eventualities including football's own poor revenue to debt ratio. In return for increasing its commercial sophistication, the AFL was able to take more advantage of the income opportunities presented by television rights, sponsorships, licensing, and endorsements.

Like any business relationship, the union of Australian football and television has had advantages and disadvantages for both parties, but the fact that the relationship has lasted 38 years and continues to flourish indicates that it is a mutually beneficial, although not necessarily equal, relationship. The dilemma for the AFL is now two-fold: how dependent should it be on its media benefactor, and how responsive should the league be to television's requests for change? Pursuing a financial safety net such as non-media-related income is one option being considered by the AFL. Media relationships do not come with a no-risk guarantee.

4.2 How is the highlights program produced and marketed in Australia and overseas?

4.2.1. Introduction

It is nine p.m. on a Sunday night. David Barham, executive producer of the ARF highlights program, has assembled his team of editors, audio technicians, camera personnel, directors, presenters, and makeup artists at Vuecast headquarters. Ahead lies 13 hours of gruelling work to fashion a 50-minute entertainment package that summarizes seven weekend football matches ready for immediate worldwide distribution. This type of television production operates under strict deadlines, especially in the case of a weekly program requiring the editing of 40 hours of videotapes.

The production process reflects not only economic and political constraints but technical and practical limitations. While the AFL does not place a high priority on

international development and does not have a large promotional budget, the highlights program is still perceived as a marketing vehicle of great potential. Vuecast produces a quality, bare-bones show (perhaps lacking the elaborate sets and technical wizardry of ABC's "Monday Night Football") but captures the dramatic elements of Australian Rules. The strength of the highlights program is the game itself, and an analogy can be made with Shakespearean theatre. Responding to reductions in government subsidies, The Royal Shakespearean Company in England has recently produced shows such as the *Merchant of Venice* with austere sets and minimal props. Critics commented that these new productions are better than ever, because the audience is not distracted by the scenery and so is able to focus on the richness of the words. Producer David Barham allows Australian football to stand on its own in his highlights program, and this is part of the show's appeal.

While the product is world class, the effects of a limited budget can be felt in the other components of the marketing mix: price, place, and promotion. Limited resources have resulted in a product whose costs are not subsidized by sponsorship and are therefore passed on to the purchaser are not underwritten by an extensive distribution system, and are not promotionally supported to facilitate competitiveness in the dog-eat-dog television environment. Realizing that the highlights program will never attain its revenue-producing potential until these problems are addressed, the AFL, as of May 1994, took over the marketing responsibilities, effectively severing all ties with Broadcom. This move coincided with the August 1994 release of the AFL's new five year marketing plan which clarifies its commitment to the internationalization of Australian football.

The marketing of the highlights program is entering a new era which in turn will impact the production of the show. How the program is produced and marketed and the changes expected in the immediate future are examined in this section. Particular attention is paid to the contributions of human agency (e.g. the executive producer), not just the overriding technological and economic structures emphasized in previous research (Stoddard, 1994).

4.2.2. Program Production

When the Vuecast production team gathers on Sunday nights, game footage from weekend games is available from the 7 network. Channel 7 has the domestic rights to free and pay television for Australian football until 1998. Through a network of stations located in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Hobart, all seven weekend AFL matches are covered by professional camera persons and technicians. As part of their agreement with the AFL, Channel 7 must provide high-quality footage to Vuecast free of charge. Vuecast not only uses the footage to produce a highlights program, but also maintains an AFL video library and makes promotional tapes for companies which have licensing contracts with the AFL. Vuecast is a private production company operating almost exclusively for the AFL.

Depending on the importance of the match, up to eight cameras are employed by 7 to cover the action. Some are positioned around the wings (i.e. halfway) and the half-forward flanks to maintain a constant focal length and to minimize camera distortion (see the playing area diagram in Appendix II). Cameras with 20:1 lens follow the play to establish long and medium shots while cameras with 50:1 lens allow closeups of individuals when play is restricted to a small section of the field or when play stops. Other cameras focus on the bench, crowd, television presenters, and dressing rooms. Because of the 165-metre length of the field, 36 players participating at any one time, the continuous speed and different phases of Australian football, all camera persons have to be skilled operators to help the director create a seamless coverage. ARF is the hardest of any football code to translate to television because it is impossible with current technology to cover the three distinct phases of action--at the kick, the actual kick, and the end of the kick. Shots of a red ball against a blue sky need to be minimalized (Barassi, 1995).

The success of Vuecast's highlights program hinges on the quality of raw footage received from Network 7. David Barham, executive producer of the highlights programs, has no control over how Channel 7 chooses to cover the game. The network has covered the game for nearly 36 years and in that time has established certain preferred practices and procedures. One of these norms is the practice of cutting to a close-up at the earliest

opportunity in order to personalize the action and heighten viewer excitement. Barham believes that 7's directors do this too frequently during a game, thus detracting from the viewing experience. The constant cutting from long to medium shots or close-ups ignores the overall geometry of Australian football, confuses overseas viewers, and reduces coverage to the movements of individuals or small packs of roving players. To overcome these problems, Barham supplements the raw footage with strategically placed info spots where nuances of football are clarified for an international audience.

The verbal description provided by Network 7 also presents Barham with problems in that 7's play-by-play and colour commentators, while experienced and knowledgeable, direct their pitch to an Australian audience acutely aware of the game and its players. Colloquialisms and nicknames punctuate the commentary, which makes it confusing for uninitiated overseas listeners. While Australianisms such as "ripper" (a good kick), "scrubber" (a poor kick), and "the freak" (an exceptional individual), may contribute to the allure of the regional coverage, a lack of understanding results for viewers foreign who may be receiving only part of the message. There is little Barham can do to remedy this problem for English-speaking viewers; however, the commentary is translated into French, Arabic, and Hebrew, amongst other languages, to help alleviate communication errors. Stephen Quartermain, the program's presenter, also attempts to clarify the commentary by highlighting important points. While the game footage and commentary supplied by Channel 7 is concerned only with the domestic Australian market, Vuecast is able to reassemble this raw material into a sporting show appropriate for international viewership.

David Barham has worked on the program since its inauguration in 1990 and has been instrumental in shaping a package targeting 18-50 year-old males who are interested in sport and looking for a new viewing experience. The producer assumes that viewers have little or no knowledge of Australian football and want to be entertained first and foremost. Barham explains,

> We lean toward entertainment. It can't be boring or people will tune out. We educate but with interesting segments. Rule explanations are brief and scripts kept

> simple. Our audience is overseas so we keep the action fast and don't use nicknames if possible, (Interview, 1994).

In this last comment, Barham is referring to his editing pattern and Stephen Quartermain's script. As much football action as possible is packed into the 50-minute programs to maintain viewer interest.

The program's replay format has evolved over the last four years from three match replays of approximately 15 minutes each to 30 minutes of the match of the day, five minutes of a second game, and five minutes of highlights of the other five matches. When the program was produced by Broadcom, Laurie Treloar (AFL Production Controller) received viewer feedback which favoured a more complete replay of the main match featuring the beginning, some action in between, and the conclusion of the match. However, this is not always possible nor preferable in a 30-minute segment because of the nature of the contest. In the program analyzed for this thesis (round 20, 1992), only the first two quarters of the match of the day are replayed because the game was a blowout, eventually won by Hawthorn by a record margin. While predetermined guidelines exist, the producer is at liberty to adjust them if the contest warrants it. Maintaining the entertainment value of the program is the highest priority.

Because of the uncertainty of the actual football contests, production scripts must be flexible. Previous encounters are good indicators of the potential evenness of contests, and it is mainly on this basis that the match of the day is selected by Vuecast. Prerecorded segments featuring key players and important events are then prepared to introduce the main match. By Friday, a rough script has been written by David Barham but nothing is definite until Sunday's final packaging. Barham explains:

> You can start out with a wonderful plan--then it changes. It depends on the matches, if they are close and exciting. You've got to be flexible. If Gary Ablett has a purple patch, we've got to show it, or if Daicos retires, for instance.

Both Ablett and Daicos are prolific goal kickers and are often featured in game close-ups. (A purple patch refers to a period of success.) At the conclusion of all weekend matches, the game previously designated as the match of the day rarely changes its positioning. Barham

first examines the opening quarter, then the overall game, and finally the goals scored and high points in order to create an exciting viewing package, even though the game itself may have been anticlimactic. Judicious editing can rescue a somewhat bland spectacle.

The editing process is not only one of the most expensive, time-consuming, and difficult activities undertaken by Vuecast, it is also the key to the entire highlights program. Most game segments are selected according to entertainment criteria, their bearing on the final result, and maintaining equitable coverage of all teams. To this end, goal scoring and marking dominate the footage as well as graphics that update the score. David Barham maintains a balance by featuring fewer successful teams in the extended game highlights during the first half of the season so he can focus on successful teams during the drive to the finals. In so doing, Barham and the AFL hope to avoid accusations of preferential treatment by parochial club administrators and enable teams to fulfill their obligations to sponsors.

While the selection of footage is based on established entertainment criteria, Barham says he, uses his experience and instincts to help guide the process. Similar responses by producers have been reported by Gruneau (1989) and Stoddart (1994) who labelled the work practices "learned skills rather than instincts". Concentrating on goal scoring in a highlights package appears to be common sense, but the selection of other play segments is more complex; this is where Barham's philosophy shapes the editing. He uses the industry standard of cutting to a new passage after a goal has been scored but reveals an innovative style by creating a short story which quickly builds to a climax. Barham believes themes are naturally occurring and include who will win, how new players will acquit themselves, and what strategies and tactics achieve success. Barham labels the highlights program "semi-live," whereby even though real time is truncated, the illusion of immediacy is maintained. The question is not what happened but what will happen as the viewer watches the story unfold.

Other than actual game replays, the program consists of an opening montage of images identifying the program as Australian, an introductory segment outlining midweek events and players to watch, a segment explaining some facet of the game, a concluding segment featuring the points table and next week's match-ups, and the marks and goals of

the week. This format closely resembles that of the "Winners" program which was telecast Sunday nights to Australian audiences until 1990. Because of the previous program's success, it became the model for football highlight shows to follow. While departures in the international program appear obvious, they are nevertheless significant. The opening shots of Ayers Rock and an Aboriginal locate the program within Australia and give it a unique identity. Barham explains: "We want to give it an Australian feel. There's not a real message. Aborigines are a big part of the game, some of the biggest stars. We give some recognition to our indigenous people."

However, Barham avoids an ESPN style, scenic introduction to an exotic locality because, he says, "As a sporting highlights package it's pitched toward people looking for new sports. We don't have one and one half minutes of travel shots because we'll have less for football." The focus is always on the game itself.

To help ground the Ayers Rock/Aboriginal images, Barham uses a few bars of didgeridoo music. This is immediately followed by a montage of 35 football action shots underscored by the program's upbeat theme music. The aim is to create an entertaining spectacle which is instantly recognizable to the viewer. While the subject of the shots may have changed over the last four years, the imagery has not. Medium shots of hyped players, umpires, and fans predominate and the fast-cutting rhythm matches the musical composition by Frank Strangio. Barham discussed with Strangio (who is contracted by Vuecast to produce music) the possibility of changing the theme, but until 1995 both were reluctant to do so because they recognized the signifying role of the music. A standard theme is crucial because it informs the viewer that something important is about to happen. Familiarity adds to the regular viewers' comfort level, thus making significant musical changes a risky venture.

After the initial montage, the viewer is greeted by Stephen Quartermain, whose role is to guide the audience through 50 minutes of Australian football. In 1990, Quartermain was selected for this important position because he had experience in presenting football on Channel 10, a network owned by Broadcom. Though Broadcom no longer produces the show, Quartermain continues to act as presenter on the strength of his track record. After

initial criticisms of drabness by viewers, Quartermain has developed a brighter, more personable style. He works closely with Barham who formulates an accurate, informative, yet simple, narrative script which helps communicate the week's football story. Care is taken to avoid colloquialisms and to slow the speed of delivery to offset the influence of Australianisms. As the presenter links all parts of the program, Quartermain's script cannot be completed until Sunday night; his is one of the more demanding roles in the whole production process.

Quartermain's narrative sometimes parallels full screen graphics which are a predominant feature of sports television. Often after a musical introduction, graphics display important information which is then re-emphasized by the presenter's narrative. In the opening segment, team standings and game schedule graphics are signified by different music and highlighted by narrative. Barham explains, "Music is important. Music with the graphics lets them know some information is going to be given . . . The idea of TV is to make it comfortable." In keeping with the rest of the program, the graphics are basic and tend to be white or yellow letters on a blue background. They resemble traffic signs and serve a similar purpose.

The opening segment of round 20, 1992 concludes with approximately 30 shots, mainly depicting Hawthorn's triumphs supported by a Quartermain voiceover. Hawthorn has been the dominant team in the last decade and is involved in the match of the day. This sequence provides the viewer with background information important for the full understanding of the programming. The purpose is to establish points of identification between the overseas viewer and Australian Rules Football. Barham subscribes to the belief that the more a person knows about a sport, the more he/she will enjoy it. He continually endeavours to explain what is going on, to promote teams and players, and generally to educate the audience about the sport.

Rule explanations in the program are important because they also inform the overseas viewer and help dispel the myth that ARF is uncontrolled mayhem. AFL administrators are conscious of their product's image and always want it portrayed in the best possible light. Reports on rule infractions by players such as prolific goal scorer Tony Lockett, who was

suspended for eight weeks in 1994 for striking a player with his forearm, are not censored by the league. AFL officials want to make it clear that while the game is a contact sport, any illegal or malicious activity is not tolerated.

Three types of rule explanations are used in the program. First, using graphics and replays, there are general segments on basic rules and how to play the game. Secondly, there are "man in white" segments, where senior umpires explain their decisions with the aid of slow motion replays. These segments are unique to the highlights program and give the viewer an opportunity to gain insight into the game and its officials. Barham has received positive feedback on this segment because it appears that the umpires are accountable to the viewers and must be able to justify their decisions. Lastly, during the game commentary when a rule violation occurs in the action, the relevant rule is quickly explained (e.g., "That was a push in the back!") Whatever the rule explanation given in the show, Barham keeps it brief and to the point. Barham is mandated to educate the viewer but not bore him/her in the process.

The concluding segment of the program also uses simple graphics, explained by Stephen Quartermain. He invites the viewer to look at the leading goal kickers and team standings which are standard statistics for this type of program. The objective is to tie up loose ends and set the scene for next week's matches. To showcase the most spectacular features of Australian football, a marks and goals of the week montage follows the rather dry match statistics. Barham choreographs the action to music, and although the marks are not perfectly synchronized to high notes, the intention is to create an exciting and entertaining montage. A Quartermain voiceover introduces each group of shots and game commentary describes the action.

Finally, the program ends with a graphic outlining next week's matches and a concluding montage of shots highlights from the weekend's matches. For round 20, 1992, the action headline was the return to form of Hawthorn's Jason Dunstall, who kicked an amazing 12 goals in his team's record defeat of Essendon. Barham believes that this weekend's high point is clear-cut. The idea that the producer does not need special abilities or training to identify the weekend headline fails to acknowledge the highly selective process

involved. Dunstall's star status is reconfirmed not just by his 12-goal haul but the extended coverage his feat attracts.

The production process, while guided by conventional practices, is also shaped by David Barham, the executive producer. While having no control over the raw game footage he receives, his careful editing and planning of the connecting segments fashions a unique program. However, Barham is careful not to allow the supporting images to overshadow the game itself. The real substance of the ARF program hopefully is not lost amongst personality profiles and extensive replay analysis.

4.2.3. Program Marketing

A successful marketing mix consists of a quality product, appropriate distribution channels (place), a suitable market price, and strategic promotion. Marketing should not be equated just with sales, even though the bottom line of any marketing activity is the accumulation of revenue. The AFL wants the highlights program to make money, promote Australian Rules Football, and encourage participation in the game. From its beginning, the AFL has embraced the idea that Australian Football is the greatest game on earth and needs to be shared with the rest of the world (Goldlust, 1987). This expansionist view, the need to find alternate sources of revenue, and a general globalization of sport trend in the 1980s reaffirmed the AFL's need to adopt a comprehensive marketing policy.

In August 1994, the AFL unveiled a new five-year marketing plan which focused on maintaining growth in television revenue, sponsorship, licensing and endorsements, and the continued internationalization of ARF. The plan acknowledged that to date only four occurrences had enhanced the development of the game overseas. They are:

- playing some modified games against Ireland from time to time,
- *providing a football highlights program for telecast in various markets around the world,
- playing a number of end-of-season exhibition matches in the U.K., Canada, Japan, the U.S.A., and New Zealand to support the telecasts, and
- providing limited funding to several overseas leagues to assist with establishment and secretariat costs, (AFL Marketing Plan, 1994: 158).

Concern was expressed over the competition from other sports in Australia that had international involvement and the potential threat of new sport programming on the soon-to-be-introduced pay television networks. While not compromising the game in Australia, a list of four international priorities were outlined. Number three on that list was the allocation of funds to markets where the AFL has a presence (London and Toronto) and where is future economic sense in investing funds. Both the highlights program and the growth of the Toronto-area league are important elements in future AFL promotional efforts. These international initiatives were to be supported by the AFL with renewed vigour. In the following section, the past and present marketing of the international highlights program is examined in more detail. Vuecast, Broadcom and the AFL have all at one time or another been actively involved in the marketing process.

When the courier calls at the Vuecast office (which is rented from the AFL) at 10 a.m. on a Monday morning to collect the highlights program, it sets a complicated process in motion. Even in this age of satellite technology, it is still significantly cheaper for videotapes of the program to be couriered to customers around the world. The package is produced on a limited budget and does not have a sponsor, so any way the purchaser's cost can be reduced is pursued. Product prices are a crucial component of the marketing mix and are what potential buyers ultimately base their decisions upon. While not available for free, as is the case with Bill Ord's "Gillette"sponsored sports program, the highlights program is nevertheless relatively inexpensive, which makes it attractive to sports cable companies. Major overseas television networks are usually not interested in esoteric sports such as Australian Rules Football.

Broadcom, which both produced and marketed the program until 1992, used a "shot gun approach" because of its limited budget. It did not focus on particular markets, preferring to sell the program to whomever wanted it. Once the program was purchased, usually on a year-to-year basis, there was little in the way of promotional follow-up. In Canada, TSN, which had shown ARF periodically since 1984, purchased a 25-program package in 1990 because it wanted to diversity its international programming portfolio. However, only a limited number of copies of a small booklet entitled "Australian Football -

A Fundamental Guide to the Game" were received to make available to interested viewers as a promotional give away. The highlights program represented another small source of revenue to the AFL rather than a true marketing tool which promoted participation in ARF.

As a result of the "shot gun approach," the program was bought by ESPN in America, which incidentally, began telecasting some ARF in 1980 and then in a regular Tuesday night prime time slot from May 1985, attracting ratings above one million viewers (Grant, 1985). The highlights program was also purchased by TSN in Canada, Channel 4 in England, Sports Channel in Japan, Star TV in Hong Kong, European television, and other companies wanting a show which appealed to younger sporting enthusiasts. For most companies it was an inexpensive filler attracting a small, youthful, male audience. Its limited importance was reflected in its variable, non-prime time programming slots, although Broadcom stipulated that it be shown as close to prime time as possible. Beginning in May 1990, TSN telecast the highlights program on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. and Tuesdays at 9:00 p.m. Toronto time and sometimes at one other time during the week. As Joanne MacIntosh, TSN Supervisor of Acquisition and Presentation Services, explains, "the program secured a niche but its schedule remained fluid. The objective was to attempt to get one prime time slot in the east and one prime time slot in the west." The time differences between eastern and western Canada made the scheduling of prime time (6 p.m. to midnight) programming across the country a problem.

Coinciding with the introduction of a new national competition, the league title and international highlights program was a series of exhibition matches sponsored by "Fosters," the Australian beer label. While these games were independent of Broadcom's marketing efforts, they served to boost the profile of ARF overseas and to capitalize on the publicity created by the new national league. The Foster's Cup, an end of season series featuring finals teams, was first played in 1986 with one game in London. In 1987, another game was played in London and two games in Vancouver. The contests were followed by one game in each of London, Miami, and Toronto in 1989, games in Portland (U.S.A.) and London in 1990, games in Auckland and London in 1991 and games at the "Foster's Oval" in London in succeeding years. Sponsoring these matches was part of Foster's own marketing

campaigns in each of the host countries. ARF was a vehicle which helped Foster's launch new products and break into new markets. This strategy may appear quite mercenary, but Foster's has a long association with football in Australia and has made significant sponsorship contributions over the years.

This association dates back to 1981 when Foster's parent company, Carlton and United Breweries (CUB), first became the AFL's corporate sponsors. Although this initial contract and the subsequent one, signed in 1986, lasted only one year, it paved the way for a long-term agreement negotiated in 1988. CUB was the AFL's corporate sponsor from 1988 to 1994 and this included the Foster's Cup summer competition, the CUB AFL premiership season, the Foster's finals' series, and State of Origin matches. The commitment by CUB maintained a steady income to the AFL during a time of team location changes, television industry upheaval, and economic strain. Foster's Australian sponsorship also gave the international highlights program a distinctive look and identity. A combination of unique action and prominent Foster's signage placed a clear Australian label on the highlights package.

It should also be noted that Foster's sponsored the television coverage of overseas exhibition matches. For example, the TSN coverage of 1989's Toronto game was underwritten by Foster's because beer and sports are consumed by the same demographic grouping. Joanne MacIntosh points out that the telecast was fully sponsored by Foster's and that, without their backing, the coverage would not have eventuated. TSN did, however, bring in controversial player Mark 'Jacko' Jackson in 1988 to stimulate interest in Australian Rules Football. His brash style and football rhetoric left a lasting impression on Canadians who viewed his television interviews. When asked by a television interviewer how tough ARF was, he replied, "How tough? We'd rip opponents' arms off, stick them in their ears, and ride them around like motorbikes . . . That's how tough it is!" Obviously Jacko's promotional tour was not officially endorsed by the AFL.

Since 1991, there have been few overseas exhibition matches. A restructured Foster's company has changed its marketing strategies and is no longer interested in

financing many football activities. The highlights program has lost a valuable ally during an economic downturn when ARF overseas could use the extra help.

Other production and marketing changes since 1991 have indirectly impacted the program. In late 1991, Prime bought the North American television rights for Australian Rules Football. ESPN no longer had room for the highlights program in their crowded programming schedule. TSN now tapes ARF programs directly from Prime's satellite, ready for future telecasting. Technically, this process does not concern TSN, except for the fact that Prime has already inserted its own commercial slots. American regulations allow 12-15 minutes of commercials per hour of programming; Canadian rules permit only eight minutes per hour. Therefore, programs formatted for 60 minutes in America may last only 55 minutes north of the 49th parallel. Canadian viewers may get the impression that they have been cheated of five minutes of action, because the program does not last the full hour.

In 1992, David Barham, then a producer on the highlights programs working for Broadcom, left to concentrate on Vuecast, his private production company. Because of Barham's expertise, the company assumed responsibility for production of the AFL highlights program and maintenance of the AFL video library. Vuecast established their base in a building owned by the AFL which is located near the home of Australian Rules Football, the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Meanwhile Broadcom, a Sydney-based company, continued with its marketing duties, hiring new personnel and sending them overseas to sell AFL programming and other sporting shows. As most agreements expired after one year, regular trips to meet personally with television executives to foster contract renewals became necessary. Face-to-face negotiations are still preferred, even in this age of modems and fax machines. Broadcom also believed that a worldwide recession was a good time to promote products vigorously and to secure a niche, because it would be well positioned to take advantage of opportunities when the global economy improved. Unfortunately, because of budgetary restrictions, AFL program marketing still tended to be scattered and lacking in direct targets.

Broadcom's contract with the AFL was renewed at the end of 1992 for another two years. During the six years of the original contract, a little over A$24 million was generated,

although most of this income came from domestic sales. Broadcom had assisted the AFL during a volatile period and, even though the company efforts were now focused on the development of satellite and cable television in Australia, the league wanted it to continue marketing the highlights program overseas. However, the priorities of Broadcom and the AFL continued to drift apart, culminating in the termination of their association when Broadcom's contract expired in 1994. Marketing responsibilities have now been taken in-house by the AFL marketing department so that promotional activities will match league objectives.

This restructuring is now impacting the international highlights program. Canadians can now access ARF publications through a Chicago distributer. Their address is advertised in the highlights program. Prime retained the North American rights for 1995, and TSN telecast the finals' series of programs this September and October. As indicated by the objectives outlined in the AFL's five-year plan released in August 1994, funds will be invested in Toronto and London because these cities have established Australian Rules Football competitions. The plan also outlines the place of the highlights program in the overall scheme:

> Television coverage into the international market is an extremely important element of our promotional effort, so we will pursue this with more vigour, together with licensed merchandise during the planning period, (AFL Marketing Plan, 1994).

In the future, more use will be made of the highlights program to help market officially licensed AFL merchandise, some of which will be manufactured overseas. Highlights programs in 1994 told viewers how they could purchase football videotapes and merchandise directly from the AFL, but these items could soon be available from a local supplier. It appears that the AFL, after flirting with the international market for 20 years, is finally prepared to attack it with a fully integrated approach. As Gorman and Calhoun (1994) conclude, "No sport today can overlook any potential source of income" (p.142). However, Grant Burgess, AFL marketing manager advocates a cautious entry into the market

> ... There seems to be a big opportunity to integrate everything but unless we can get someone who has the credentials to do that properly, it's my belief that we shouldn't waste the time and energy on it.

Ostensibly, taking the marketing responsibility for the highlights program in-house is only a temporary measure until the AFL finds a suitable replacement for Broadcom.

Finally, it is significant that Coca-Cola has recently signed a 10-year, multimillion dollar sponsorship deal with the AFL. This severs football's ties with the distinctly Australian, but controversial, Foster's beer company and links the code with the more conservative but distinctly American Coca-Cola company. The advantages of this business association should outweigh the partial loss of the football product's uniquely Australian identity. In light of a recent article in the Edmonton Journal (Conrad, 1995) which reported that Coke is pulling out of big time pro sports and concentrating on sponsoring sports positioned to boom, along with Optus Vision's financial interest in football programming, the AFL has sreason to be optimistic about the future.

4.2.4. Summary

The political/economic and technical/organization context of production suggest conventions and ideology about the natural or commonsense way to make a good highlights program. However, the opportunity exists for human agents such as the executive producer to shape the program according to his original ideas and beliefs. Unfortunately, this autonomy is infrequently exercised. The result can be standard highlights fare.

A parallel situation occurs in the marketing of the highlights program. Business ideology shapes the whole process, but the opportunity exists for individuals to stamp their own unique style on promotional ventures. However, in the case of the highlights program, innovation in marketing is even less prevalent than production initiatives. The status quo is rigidly maintained.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE ANALYSIS OF TEXT: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 What messages are embodied in the highlights program and how are they engendered?

5.1.1. Introduction

Developed during a period of financial crisis in the television and football industries, the highlights series at first glance appears to be a low budget promotion of ARF. Beneath the bare-bones facade, however, lies a presentation rich in semiotic value. Although the messages and meanings created by the visual images and sound track can be many and varied, the one set of interpretations preferred by the producer centers on entertainment. The messages communicated by the highlights package and the manner in which they are produced is the focal point for analysis in this investigation.

David Barham, executive producer of the highlights program, believes he is creating a sports video which is entertaining and dramatic, yet informative and educational. These characteristics are typical of the sport highlights genre. The shows are designed to appeal to a broadcast audience consisting of sporting and non-sporting viewers. Sports are reduced to their most dramatic components and scripts are simplified so that no prior knowledge of the sport is required. Viewers are massaged and entertained by the program, not directly challenged, by the content.

The style of the ARF highlights program is not unique and conforms to a format created by British television producers and popularized on American television. The basic approach is that edited shows should be tightly shot, snappy, and loud. Close-ups are used at every opportunity and the cutting rhythm is up-tempo. Sound tracks are used to amplify and simplify the visual imagery. The basic premise of the highlights format is that visual style always supersedes journalistic substance.

This conventional style not only attracts viewers but assists in their understanding of the program. Audiences come to expect a certain look and a certain format in highlights packages. The format features graphics, action, replay, and talking heads. Viewer conditioning enables the producers to construct messages and hopefully have them

interpreted in a preferred manner. Both the encoding and decoding processes are facilitated by the use of a standardized style and format.

Another advantage of these production standards is that a relationship based on trust and consistency is fostered between producer and viewer. The highlights plot unfolds in a predictable and non-threatening manner. As there are no surprising twists in the script, the viewer is never left dazed and confused. Standardization is what viewers seem to want and that is what they get.

The cookie-cutter approach used by producers prompts the question, "If the programs all look alike, how can the viewer tell them apart?" The answer is straight forward: beyond style there is some substance. Although they all belong to the football paradigm, the ARF, American football, Canadian football, South African rugby, and British soccer have significant differences. Australian Rules Football, in particular, is quite unlike any other sport. Once seen, it is rarely forgotten. The game itself is what distinguishes one highlight package from another, although the opportunity exists for the uninformed viewer to confuse one football code with another. A general overview of the conventional style and standard plot of sports highlights programs and some of the features of ARF are now discussed.

5.1.2. Overview

Because of television's relatively poor resolution qualities and the limitations imposed by the physical size of the television screen, close-ups become a necessity. In particular, the up-close and personal style of highlights programs commands viewer attention and is better suited to revealing player character than to capturing action (Berger, 1982). To compete with being at the live sporting event, the television event must provide features not available to the stadium spectator. Until the advent of scoreboard screens and laptop TV monitors, close-ups are not available even to fans in the best seats. The Australian Rules Football field is 165 metres by 150 metres, thereby reducing spectating to a long-distance event. Camera shots showing just the footballer's face or parts of his body establish a personal relationship between the athlete and the television viewer. This illusion of physical proximity featured in highlights programs is literally "in your face" and realistic. Viewers are made to feel part of the action.

The live spectator can choose what to look at from among many options. For the television viewer, the producer determines the boundaries of the shot. By using tightly framed close-ups and medium shots, the highlights producer draws attention to aspects of the sport that he deems important. The game progresses in an unpredictable manner, but the producer as auteur decides what to show and for how long. For example, in ARF the goal umpire receives close attention. As the television image is under the control of the auteur, it reflects his or her values and industry norms. Unless viewers have interactive television where a choice of camera angles is possible, the only choices available to them are whether to watch the highlights program or not.

5.1.3. The Program as a Short Story

The standard plot for highlights program is similar to a good short story. Like stories, highlights programs are centred on a theme which gives them unity and introduces statements about life and value systems. The main theme in highlights programs is the question "Who will win?" Whannel (1992) contends that the question of who will be the winner is the unifying theme in all sportscasts. Consequently, losers are identified but never featured in the narrative process.

Although each program may give the theme a slightly different treatment, winning is the dominant idea. The winners are characterized as hard-working, clean-living athletes possessing the right combination of skills and attitude to be successful. Winners epitomize the success ideology which permeates our society.

The importance of the "who will win" theme is exemplified in the taped ARF highlights program. Despite the fact that all games featured in the show have been completed and the results known, the narrative persists in establishing the transparent "who will win" scenario. Maintaining the illusion of immediacy ostensibly promotes viewer interest in the program. Viewers understand that if they watch the show, the winners will be identified as the story unfolds.

Stephen Quartermain, presenter of the Australian highlights program, sets the scene with the first voiceover in the show:

> The winner will keep its final's hopes alive. For the loser, its curtains. With so much at stake, get set for a wild time as the Bombers and the Hawks go at it, (AFL Highlights Program, Round 20, 1992).

Winning is the passport to greater glory. Losing is a plunge into the depths of obscurity. The program will reveal both the victor and the vanquished, so the viewer can sit back and be entertained. The highlights program, like the short story, is based on a sequence of events. This sequence includes the antecedent action and exposition, the inciting or initial incident, the rising action, climax, and the falling action. Television coverage of ARF has been likened to a male soap opera with lashings of blood, sweat, and tears (Poynton and Hartley, 1990). Comparisons between the highlights program and a short story, therefore seem particularly appropriate. As the dramatic plot unfolds in a predictable sequence, it offsets the confusion of the unfamiliar game and the uncertainty of its outcome. A formulistic plot assists in viewer understanding of the program.

The antecedent action includes the events that occurred before the story began. Readers are told what has happened so far. An exposition reveals enough background information so that the reader will understand what is going on. The basic obstacles to overcome are described. This short story sequence equates to the pre-game introduction segment of the ARF program. In this element the team standings, games to be played, and conditions of star players are outlined. The teams and key players are introduced to the viewer who is then provided with information deemed necessary by the producer for an understanding of the program.

The initial incident is the first event that moves the story forward and sparks the rest of the action. Events that follow complicate the story and build drama. This rising action develops the conflict for the main characters until a climax is reached. The climax is not only the highest point of interest in the story but also the turning point, where conflict is resolved. At this juncture, the outcome is determined and the winners identified.

The game play element of the highlights program parallels the initial incident, rising action, and climax of a short story. Game one (or specifically the opening bounce) is the catalyst for the action to begin. The pace is maintained by the other game replays. They

help build excitement and interpret the premiership race. The climax is reached when all the matches are completed and the final results known.

Finally, the falling action and the conclusion wrap up the short story plots. Nothing new happens in the story, outcomes are clarified, and loose ends are tied up. Similar to the falling action and conclusion is the post-game wrap-up segment of the highlights program. Statistics are provided such as the leading goal kickers, team standings, next week's matches to summarize past, present, and future events. Segments on the marks and goals of the week and the efforts of star players neatly round out the program. An apparently natural conclusion is reached.

5.1.4. The Format

A common format arises as a logical progression from the standardized style and plot of the highlights program. Not only are the elements similar but episodes within these elements tend to have a sameness. In the case of ARF, the program "The Winners" had a similar format to the highlights program examined in this investigation. "The Winners" was produced in Australia for domestic consumption and featured weekend matches in a highlight form.

The format for "The Winners" followed this sequence:

1. Theme music and visuals
2. Presenter's narrative
3. First game replay
4. Progressive score table
5. Presenter's narrative
6. Second game replay
7. Progressive score table
8. Presenter's narrative
9. Interview
10. Presenter's narrative
11. Team Standings Table
12. Leading Goal Kicker Table

13. Highlights from other matches
14. Presenter's narrative
15. Mark of the Day
16. Play of the Day
17. Presenter's narrative
18. Next week's games
19. Presenter's narrative
20. Goals of the Day

(Poynton and Hartley, 1990)

The following discussion demonstrates how closely the ARF highlights program emulates this sequence and the connotations of such a format. The analysis elaborates on the pre-game introduction, game play, and post-game wrap-up elements and how they may be read by viewers.

5.1.5. The Pre-Game Introduction

The show opens with a sequence of 75 shots in 4.5 minutes (1.6 seconds/shot). This rapid progression of shots is aimed at grabbing the viewers' attention. Combined with the soundtrack, the images are signals to the viewers to stop what they are doing and pay attention. Viewers are being summoned to attend the performance.

The program's success is greatly determined by the entertainment value of the opening sequence. If the viewer is not hooked early, he/she may channel surf, possibly never to return. To examine the hook closely, the introduction is divided into a series of episodes, each containing its own syntagmatic structure and paradigmatic categories.

5.1.5.1. Episode One

Episode one is 36 shots or 47 seconds in length. Not only does this montage separate this program from the previous one and command attention, but it attempts to signify to the viewer that he/she is watching a sporting event with real drama. However, the series of images blurs the distinction between the game (with its rules and regulations) and television (with its own codes and conventions). Although a sports-television hybrid is formed on the highlights video, this is rarely acknowledged. Viewers are not made aware that combining

sport and television is a selective process rather than flowing and natural. The realism myth is perpetuated.

Camera techniques enable the home viewer to see a different view than what is available to the football spectator. Television technology enhances the viewing experience by taking the audience into the middle of the action and promising excitement. A spectacular mark, where the player leaps off the ground and catches the ball overhead despite opponent interference, is tightly framed in shot 25. This frame enables the viewer to see technique, muscle movement, and facial expression. The footballer is the central focus, and the viewer is encouraged to sit back and watch. The first shot in episode one clearly identifies the program as Australian. A sunlit Ayers Rock, the outback symbol of Australia, is shown from an aerial position. The stunning landscape reverberates with a soundtrack featuring the didgeridoo. This Aboriginal wind instrument consolidates the authenticity of the Australian scene, leaving no doubt in the viewer's mind as to the location of the images.

Shot two continues the theme with a close-up of the white painted face of a young male Aboriginal. The racial group indigenous to Australia is an important component of its identity but this passing visual reference glosses over the problems Aborigines face. Juxtaposed to shot two is a close-up of the black and white painted faces of two young football supporters. This sequence connects Aborigines to ARF but trivializes native culture. Another connotation is that football is indigenous to Australia, football and Aborigines have been assimilated into the national identity. These images also attempt to signify that Aboriginals are important players in the ARF game. After these establishing shots, a footballer is shown vigorously punching padded gloves held by a trainer. This is followed by shots of two umpires thrusting their fists overhead and fans doing the same. This punctuating the air with fists not only serves as a physical exclamation marks but binds the enthusiasm of players, umpires, and spectators for ARF. Australians are passionate about their "footy" (as the locals call it).

Coinciding with the fist sequence is a change in the tempo to the program's theme music. This upbeat music signifies that the show is beginning and it introduces viewers to the spectacle. The theme music continues on the soundtrack until shot 19. It is not directly

in synch with the image cutting pattern, but it does give rhythm to the montage of shots and acts as a musical fanfare.

This nonverbal introduction is characteristic of many television programs. It acts as program identification and draws the potential viewer to the television. 'The Winners' also starts with a musical denotation of the program. The fanfare signifies the imminent public appearance of an exalted event and constructs a "what we are about to receive" relationship between the viewer and the spectacle (Poynton and Hartley, 1990). Without words to anchor the meaning, the opening images are pure spectacle.

The building excitement and spectacle are dramatically signified in the first episode of the highlights program by a shot of balloons rising. Masses of black and white balloons float skyward in front of a grandstand packed with spectators. Not only is football being celebrated, but the balloons symbolize the oval shape of footballs. The connection between football and excitement is reinforced. A balloon shot is also used in "The Winners." According to Poynton and Hartley (1990), the image becomes a metaphor for life. The balloon sequence, with its mass display of devotion, can be abstracted to inspire higher idealistic notions where the struggle for victory is universalized. Football is a combination of spectacle, spiritual experience, and myth. While this analysis is subjective, it does point to the polysemic nature of the imagery. Some viewers may be caught up in the euphoria of the event.

Shots 12 to 18 in episode one continue to build excitement and tension. All participating parties (players, spectators, and umpires) are featured in this montage. In shot 18, an aerial view of a crowded MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) is presented. The MCG is the home of ARF and cricket in Australia. Its distinctive circular shape is not only instantly recognizable to Australians, but when viewed from above, an ecclesiastical image is suggested because of the superior viewing position. Television viewers are in the privileged position of looking down on the holy shrine of ARF, where a highly ritualized contest is about to begin. They are honoured guests.

The next shot is anchored by narrative. A special effect produces a screen within a screen where a team banner appears in the middle of shot 18 and enlarges to fill the screen.

A voiceover, accompanied by low volume theme music, stresses the importance of the presentation. Shot 19 concludes with a literal tearing down of the curtain as players break through the banner to run onto the football field. Viewers are made aware that the beginning of the big game is imminent.

It is worth noting that although the program producers are targeting an international audience, some Australian colloquialisms are retained in the presenter's narrative. The opening monologue includes phrases such as "crunch time", and "for the loser it's curtains" to give it an Aussie flavour as well as highlighting the drama and tension of the contest. It is clear there are rewards for the winners and grave consequences for the losers--as there are in real life.

Next the viewer is teased by dramatic action snaps of high marks, brutal tackling, and skillful goal kicking. While previous shots hinted at the macho image of "footy," this sequence displays the full athletic masculinity of the contest. Titans of testosterone struggle with one another for possession of the football trophy. Five sequential shots displaying five separate marks elicit a connection between these airborne human tableaus and the erect male phallus. The imagery objectifies the footballer's body and enables the male viewer to observe closely without the stigma of homo-erotic overtones. Physical performance produces pleasure for the male viewer.

While the marks are not synchronized to the beat and pitch of the theme music as in the case of "The Winners," the soundtrack does accentuate the buildup of dramatic tension. The masculine action appears to be selected and choreographed to complement the music and the confrontational theme. Music draws the viewers' attention to the imagery and underscores the mood and setting of the program. The theme music, however, is rarely allowed to dominate the football action. It has a co-starring role.

Episode one concludes with a cessation of the theme music and a visual special effect where a still picture folds over the action like a page in a book. The message is that the preliminary events and opening montage have concluded and another chapter in the story is about to begin. Episode one is high on spectacle and low on information. Its purpose is to

focus the viewers' attention and to entertain. Through vivid imagery, the program is firmly located within the Australian context.

5.1.5.2. Episode Two

The next sequence of shots is anchored by narrative. Stephen Quartermain, the presenter, introduces himself and the program to the viewer. He provides background information by the viewer needs to understand what is going on in the program. Quartermain's multimedia presentation draws heavily on images, graphics, and narrative to describe the events that occurred before the program began. The distinction between sport and narrative is blurred.

Initially Quartermain, an Australian sports broadcaster, outlines the format of the program. By addressing the camera directly, he attempts to establish a relationship with the viewer. Trust is hopefully developed as Quartermain leads the viewer through what to expect over the next 50 minutes. The overview is brief and minimally scripted.

Next, a series of full shot graphics illustrating team standings and games to be played are linked by Quartermain's narrative. The graphics act as important signposts illustrating information which is hard to visualize, while Quartermain's narrative is presented as authoritative commentary. He uses war analogies such as "tight tussle," "the winner will stay alive," "battling it out," and "crucial factors" to add drama and a sense of excitement to rather dry football statistics. Nevertheless, these statistics allow the viewer to understand the relative importance of the matches featured in the highlights program. Supposedly, the more the viewers know about the ARF competition, the more they can relate to the play action itself.

The background information provided by the narrative introduces the 15 teams in the competition and explains the significance of past, present, and future matches. This exposition and antecedent action sets up the rest of the program. It establishes the scene before any new action occurs and re-emphasizes the central theme of "Who will win?"

5.1.5.3. Episode Three

Episode three completes the pre-game element by profiling Hawthorn, the dominant team in the AFL for the past decade. This places events in a historical context, a feature not

always included in sportscasts. In the first sequence, the imagery celebrates past triumphs and highlights present tribulations. Quartermain explains that despite a strong winning tradition, the team is on the brink of elimination from the finals due to poor form, injuries, and suspensions. Key players (main characters) in the Hawthorn saga are identified for the viewer. This focus on star players and teams is a convention common to sportscasts. In order to personalize the viewing experience and to develop an atmosphere of real life drama and tension, the producer fosters the star system. By concentrating on individual experience, points of identification develop between players and viewers. This is part of the hook used to encourage viewers to become regular followers. If you feel that you know someone, you are more likely to care about the outcome of his/her efforts. Stars are also consistent performers who guarantee the entertainment value of the sportscast.

Shots 47-75 also feature the media attention and fan adulation attracted by Hawthorn. When Jason Dunstall kicks his 100th goal, fans stream onto the field to offer their congratulations, forcing the mounted police to disperse the commotion. As Hawthorn leaves the field after winning the 1991 Premiership, the media encircle them, bathing them in a sea of light from camera flashes. These spectacles dramatically demonstrate to the viewer not only Hawthorn's popularity but Australia's fascination for sporting heroes in general. Athletes attain almost mythical status. The highlights program presents ARF as the nation's most important sport, capable of stirring strong emotions among followers.

Although the pre-game introduction is only four minutes 28 seconds or 75 shots long, it sets the tone for the rest of the program by trying to ensure that the initial encounter between viewer and presentation is a pleasurable one. Australian Rules Football is characterized by speed, ruggedness, and athleticism, and this is what is displayed in the opening configuration. The entertainment value of the action is increased by the liberal use of medium shots and close-ups, quick cutting, and dramatic narrative. Dramatic game action is enhanced by production practices to attract viewers and to provide them with a fast-paced, highly entertaining spectacle. Finally, the pre-game element signifies the transformation from a sporting event to a television event, from realism to entertainment, and from real time to manipulated time. It epitomizes the "real life, real drama, real TV" myth. This segment

truncates many events into a 4.5 minute package, thus making it the most dynamic portion of the whole program.

5.1.6. The Game Play Element

The game play segment has a syntagmatic structure and logic quite distinctive from other elements. Aspects of the action tend to be shot in conventional ways. Marks, goals, and general play are covered in a manner similar to that used for other football codes such as soccer and rugby. Prescribed shot patterns are repeated numerous times throughout the show. However, it is through the selection and combination of these patterns that the producer can express his artistic flair.

David Barham, the executive producer of the ARF highlights program, receives 40 hours of game footage from Channel 7 each week. Most of this footage is anchored by commentary directed toward the domestic Australian market. During the editing process, game segments are selected and combined with taped studio material to produce a 50-minute program suitable for international audiences. This already difficult task is made more stressful by the 12-hour time limit from the taping of the last game Sunday night to the distribution of the highlights around the world Monday morning. Barham has artistic license within some very restrictive limits.

For the purposes of this study, the game play element was halved from approximately 43 minutes to 22.5 minutes. The first sequence of action, or the initial incident which advances the football story, has been edited out, but the essence of the drama has been retained. Important events in the rising action which help build the suspense remain intact. The conflict generated by the football contests complicate life for the main characters (or star players), because they are confronted with new challenges. Real football represents real drama for the combatants.

Important events in the action equate to the seven different matches covered in the game play element. These matches in turn correspond to the syntagmatic episodes in the action. The only other episode in this element is the "man in white" segment, where a senior umpire explains rule decisions for the benefit of international viewers.

As previously mentioned, the repetitive pattern of the imagery enables the analysis to proceed in general terms rather than shot by shot or episode by episode. Immediately it becomes clear that the principles Whannel (1992) labels "maximum action in minimum space" and "getting in tight and personal" structure the cutting pattern of the game play. The imagery constantly alternates between a wide focus which shows the field position of players to a narrow focus showing individual performers. Straight cuts are used in preference to zooms or pans. The pace is so brisk and the action so flowing that the commentary sometimes lags behind the action or becomes disjointed and monosyllabic. This can result in a presentation which may be confusing to the viewer.

Shots 13 to 21 show a transition by Hawthorn from gaining possession of the ball in their own end to being in a goal scoring position. A series of two handballs and three kicks advance the ball downfield while the commentary struggles to keep up with all the action. The breaks in play immediately preceding and following the scoring of a goal provide the opportunity for extended comments, especially from the colour analysts. The announcer's linking narrative and voiceovers also interpret events for the disoriented viewer (a tension/release/reappraisal sequence is established). Building upon the trust relationship fostered in the pre-game introduction, Quartermain explains what has been going on. For example, in shot 109 he summarizes the action to date and outlines what is to follow. Not only does this studio material clarify matters for the viewer, but it erodes some real time illusions (i.e., the game is currently being played.). A clear distinction can be made between game commentary and presenter narrative.

The prime camera positions are opposite and slightly above the half forward lines which are approximately 55 metres out from the goals. From these ideal vantage points, all action can be covered without the need for special lens which tend to distort the image. Image distortion is a problem for television coverage of ARF because the field dimensions are significantly greater than those of other football codes. Whilst soccer can be adequately covered from halfway, Australian Rules Football cannot. This problem is further compounded by the aerial and earth bound nature of the game. Covering the flight of the ball as well as giving the position of players on the turf is difficult. Positioning the cameras at

the half-forward lines enables the same focal length to be used when panning from the centre circle to the goal square. It also facilitates the coverage of all phases of play.

At each of the prime camera locations are two cameras. One has a 50:1 lens while the other has a 20:1 lens. This configuration allows the rapid transition from long shot to medium shot and back again from the same angle. Soccer and rugby coverage utilize similar arrangements (Whannel, 1992). Other cameras located on the ground, in the stands, and in the dressing rooms are sometimes used by ARF; but the prime cameras dominate the coverage. Conventions established in film and other sportscasts are used in the program. These include the 180^0 rule where the prime cameras are all positioned on one side of the field and do not cross an imaginary line running lengthwise down the centre of the field. Another convention is the principle of complementary angles, whereby cuts from one shot to the next retain the same angle although the focal length may have changed. Both of these conventions ensure that the viewer is not totally disoriented by the montage of shots. Like the spectator seated on one side of the field who sees the action from one particular angle, the television viewer has one prime viewing position. The difference is that television technology has the potential to offer the viewer more visual variety from this prime position. This includes close-ups, slow motion, instant replays, highlights, and graphics.

Most football action is covered by a medium shot. Most or all of the athlete's body is shown in the frame and signifies a personal relationship between the player and viewer. The ARF highlights program coverage of general play tends to follow a medium shot, long shot, medium shot pattern. When a player gains possession of the ball in open play, he is tightly framed; but as he disposes of the ball by kicking, the program cuts to a long shot to show the relative positions of players. Tracking the exact flight path of the ball is a low priority. Rarely does the viewer see a full passage of play within the cutting from medium shot to long shot. The desire to personalize the action overrides all other factors including viewer eye strain and providing a feel for the overall geometry of the game.

In soccer and rugby coverage, the medium shot also predominates. Long shots are used for the commencement of play but as soon as the action is restricted to a smaller area, a medium shot is used (Whannel, 1992). This suggests that the imperatives of television

rather than the sport itself dictate the type of visual coverage. Producers argue that it is common sense to cut to medium shots as soon as possible to keep the show fast paced and exciting. Some critics, such as those involved in the promotion of football, are frustrated by the boundaries imposed by narrow framing and prefer a wider focus where the evolving strategy of a game can be observed. A quick cut to an individual or small group of players eliminates scrutiny of most of the 18 players on an ARF team. To the uninitiated international viewer, ARF may resemble close encounters within a pack of lawless males.

If the medium shot is the norm at the visual level, then natural sound and commentary are the aural norms. To simulate the atmosphere of the stadium event and to enhance the realism of the imagery, game noise is used on sportscasts. Overlaying these sounds is the play-by-play and colour commentary whereby experts describe and interpret the action. The anchoring effects of commentary have been discussed, but it should also be pointed out that an energized description contributes to the drama and excitement of the television spectacle.

By convention, the play-by-play announcer is a television professional who has some formal speech and presentation training. This is in contrast to the colour commentator, who is often a former player, very knowledgeable about the game and its players but not necessarily an expert in articulating his thoughts. Normally the play-by-play man describes the action while the colour man adds analytical observations during breaks in play. However, because of the constraints placed by the pace and flowing nature of ARF, the colour commentator sometimes gives the play-by-play man a rest by taking over the main description. After a short period, the commentators return to their specialist duties.

Evidence of this can be heard during game two of the highlights program. During a short break in the action where Melbourne has been awarded a free kick, the play-by-play and colour commentators change roles. The colour man continues to call the action for about 30 seconds before the play-by-play man resumes his normal duties. Two action-packed minutes later, while a Melbourne player prepares to kick the ball, commentating roles are again reversed. Essentially the play-by-play commentator is given a chance to get his breath so he can continue to call the action.

The main objective of all the on-field activity is to win the football game, which achieved by scoring more points than the opponent. The most valuable play in ARF is the six-point goal. To score a goal, the ball must be kicked directly between the taller goal posts. Coverage of the goal scoring sequence tends to follow a set pattern. A long shot showing the ball passing between the posts is followed by a close-up of the goal umpire signalling a goal and a close-up of the goal scorer. A medium shot of the crowd underlined by a score graphic and the ubiquitous replay of the first three shots round off the sequence. This routine coverage helps the neophyte viewer understand action (see the AFL visual codes in Appendix II).

Similar goal scoring syntagmatic structures are seen in British television. Soccer, like ARF, is a free flowing game where the objective is to score goals. Fiske and Hartley (1978) report that the BBC's coverage of the soccer goal sequence consists of five shots. A medium shot of the goal being scored, a shot of the scorer receiving congratulations from teammates, a shot of cheering fans, a slow motion replay of the goal being scored, and the initial triumph of the scorer. In a later study by Silk (1994) of Sky Television's coverage, no set order was defined, but the sequence did include a shot of the crowd, a player close-up, a graphic of goals scored, a wide shot of the soccer ground, slow motion replays, and a 'Goal, Goal, Goal' graphic after each replay. These observations again indicate that television convention dictates visual style rather than the football code itself. Common to the three types of football coverage are the shots of the goal, a player close-up (the star), a shot of the crowd, and the action replay. Most surprising are the similarities over the 18-year time span from the BBC effort in 1976 to the Sky coverage in 1994. Even though television technology has advanced significantly, the addition of graphics and a net cam seem to be the only major difference between the two eras.

The ARF goal sequence not only denotes that a goal has been scored but signifies the importance of the event. The initial long shot offers an all-seeing, all-knowing, privileged connotation to the television audience as viewers are able to watch the activities of many individuals from one angle. Cutting to a close-up of the goal umpire allows the viewer to examine closely the white-coated official. These rule enforcers, while in control of the game,

are made accountable to the viewing public for their decisions. Next, the close-up of the goal scorer places him in the spotlight, thus rewarding him for accomplishing his mission. The scorer receives personal acknowledgement from the camera. The crowd shot gives the viewer a feeling for the player's on-field experience. Being surrounded by adoring fans is a special moment. Finally, the replay enables the viewer to evoke the euphoria of the event and closely examine exactly what lead up to the dramatic moment. Colour commentary assists with the analysis of the play action.

Viewers are entertained by the goal scoring sequence, where the most important performer other than the goal scorer is the goal umpire. One of the most memorable features of ARF is the lone male figure, dressed in a white fedora, shirt, and lab coat, black tie, pants and shoes who stands behind the goal posts. The umpire's attire and robotic-like signals suggest professionalism, objectivity, control, and eccentricity. This conservatively dressed nerd-like figure is the direct antithesis of the bare armed, energetic, athletic, emotional footballer. While the goal umpire may appear isolated and aloof to the viewer, he is not only the perfect foil for the frantic on-field activity, but he alone decides whether or not a goal is scored. The goal umpire is an important character in the football narrative and deserves special attention from the camera.

The subject of clothing and looks is important in ARF as it is in all aspects of modern society. Not only does the goal umpire present a striking image, but the Aussie footballer symbolizes aestheticised masculinity (i.e. attractive male images). Bronzed and muscular bodies clad only in sleeveless jerseys and butt-hugging micro shorts project a look that Schwarzenegger and Stallone might envy. While the minimal clothing and accessories are somewhat functional for the Aussie footballer, it raises the question of an ulterior purpose. There is no denying that the macho look is a marketable one as evidenced by the recent proliferation of beefcake videos, playing cards, pin-up calendars, and Mark 'Jacko' Jackson's 15 minutes of fame in the 1980s. Sexuality sells, and the objectification of the male body is very evident in the close-ups and replays of the football action. Male and female viewers have the opportunity to gaze in their own way on the bodily display. This slant ostensibly contributes to the allure of ARF.

Arguably the most spectacular component of ARF is the mark. When a player seemingly defies gravity by leaping off the ground and catches the football above the outstretched arms of opponents, the crowd roars their approval. Television coverage of this athletic skill exclusively relies on medium shots or close-ups. To display fully the grace of the mark, a narrow focus becomes a necessity. As the mark often precedes a kick at the goal, its coverage is quite stylized. The sequence begins with a long shot of the players positioning themselves for the ball, followed by the camera zooming in on the leapers. Next the coverage cuts to a medium shot or close up of the player who actually takes the mark. He is followed back to the ground. If the player decides to take a kick, the focus remains in close; but if he immediately handballs, the camera zooms out or cuts to a long shot. While the close focus of the mark may signify eroticism, evoking erection imagery, it mainly establishes a personal relationship between the viewer and a spectacular athletic stunt.

Coverage of set plays such as the centre bounce or throw in follows the same sequence, that is a long shot of the position of players, a medium shot or close-up of the player's contact with the ball, and a long shot as the ball is disposed of. This pattern is once again consistent with the analysis of soccer coverage made by Whannel (1992). He summarizes the coverage as a series of long shots for the commencement of play, medium shots as soon as play is restricted to a smaller space, close-ups for breaks in the action, and long shots for the recommencement of play. Whannel's observation suggests that the ARF coverage conforms to broadcasting industry norms and does not provide anything new or innovative. An advantage of this approach is that overseas viewers should be able to understand the pattern of the imagery.

The "man in white" segment is the unique episode in the game play element. It is shown after the first two game episodes and features a senior football umpire explaining some holding-the-man decisions he made in the match of the day. As well as being educational and interesting, this interlude displays a degree of accountability by the umpire to the viewer. It may also reflect the anti-authoritarian attitude that pervades Australian society. These segments signify that umpires are not above reproach and must justify their actions. This feature provides also a point of identification between the game officials and

the international viewer. Audiences can empathize with the man in the middle rather than just perceiving him as the faceless enforcer of the rules. Both the goal and field umpires receive close attention in the highlights program, which tells the viewer they have important roles in the contest and that the game itself is not a lawless free-for-all.

The narrative by John Russo (the field umpire) is especially revealing. He acknowledges being acutely aware of the crowd noise and the electric atmosphere it creates. Russo walks the viewer through a slow motion analysis of why his decisions were made. Key movements by both the players and umpires are identified for the audience. For example, Russo points out "the goal umpire you'll see in a moment steps up to the line, realizes the free kick has been awarded, so he steps back. Gary Lyon takes his free kick." After his explanation, Russo asks the viewer to sit back and enjoy the rest of the action, thereby acting as a promoter of the program. His endorsement purportedly signifies the objectivity and quality of the television show.

The plot of the game-play element has been likened to the initial incident, rising action, and climax of a short story. However, it may be more accurate to talk of a series of initial incidents, rising action, and mini climaxes corresponding to each of the seven games shown in the highlights program. Again this is similar to what Gruneau et al. (1988) identify as a rhythm of tension/release/re-appraisal in sports coverage. Each game has a number of events which move the story along and spark the rest of the action. The conflict builds until a turning point is reached and the situation is resolved. Once the viewer knows who wins each game, the episode is essentially over. After all seven game episodes are completed, the highlights program enters the post game wrap-up phase which is discussed next.

5.1.7. The Post Game Wrap-up Element

This is the third and final major syntagmatic portion of the highlights program. It consists of an episode on statistics, one on the marks and goals of the week, and a segment featuring the league's marquee player, Jason Dunstall. These episodes correspond to the falling action and conclusion of a short story. No new events occur, outcomes are clarified, loose ends are tied up, and the program is brought to a close.

The first episode concentrates on football statistics. Existence of these records gives the impression of professionalism and credibility. Not only do graphics replace scoreboards, they also function as signposts to display valuable information clearly. The first and by implication the most important graphic, showing the leading goal kickers, is explained by a Stephen Quartermain voiceover. Goal kickers are the stars of ARF and therefore receive top billing. Quartermain invites the viewer to peruse the summary of the achievements of stars such as Dunstall, Lockett, and Kernahan. Two of the individual goal kicking efforts top 100 goals, which suggests to the viewer that these are super athletes in a fast-paced and high-scoring game.

Graphic number two details the team standings where a new team (Footscray) has taken over the top spot as a result of the matches completed in the program. An interesting feature of this graphic is the ratio, points, and percentage columns. Viewers accustomed to straight win/loss statistics may find this different system puzzling. Footscray tops the list with a ratio of 74, a total of 56 points, and a percentage of 133.9%. Quartermain offers no explanation of the numbers other than a run down of the team placings themselves. This suggests to the viewer that ratio and percentage are not vital statistics, which is not true. Ratio and percentage are used to separate teams who have the same win/loss ratio.

Quartermain's voiceover does, however, emphasize the closeness and excitement of the competition. He points out that only one game separates first and fifth place, Hawthorn can make the playoffs but Essendon's chances are gone, and that the battle for the wooden spoon (i.e. last place) is between Sydney and Brisbane. Quartermain focuses on the playoff contenders and the two bottom teams but fails to mention the five other teams. The message for the viewer is that these teams no longer are important and do not have a significant bearing on the playoff picture. They can be ignored.

The next episode showcases the most athletic skills in ARF, marking and goal kicking. Examples of the most spectacular marks and goals of the week are displayed. Quartermain's narrative identifies the star performers in the action while the game commentary vividly describes their efforts. Names already familiar to the viewer, such as Dunstall, Morrissey, Lyon, and Platin, predominate as well as lesser known colloquial

descriptors such as "screamer" and "ripper." The segment honours mostly Hawthorn players because of their huge win in the match of the day and their championship reputation. This coverage signifies to the viewer that the day belonged to the Hawthorne Hawks and they are back to top form.

The last episode of the post game wrap-up outlines next week's round of matches and profiles one of the ARF's most prolific goal scorers, Jason Dunstall. Once again, a graphic is used to illustrate important information. Quartermain's voiceover walks the viewer through the impending conflicts and in so doing attempts to spark interest in the following week's highlights program. The viewer is encouraged to tune in next week to see the premiership story continue. As one would anticipate, the upcoming game involving Hawthorn receives top billing. Like a star performer, Hawthorn guarantees a certain number of rear ends on lounge seats. Hawthorn epitomizes success and, as winners, they are idolized in Australian society taking on almost legendary status.

Just before Jason Dunstall exhibits his abundant talent, Stephen Quartermain appears to bid farewell personally to the viewer and officially close the program. He highlights the significance of the day's proceedings, i.e., "the day the Hawks pummelled the Bombers to win by a record margin," and introduces the Dunstall superstar montage. In Quartermain's last sentence, he expresses his expectation to see the viewer next week. Although physically impossible, this concluding sentence signifies a personal invitation for the viewer to watch next week.

As Dunstall struts his stuff, the closing credits begin to roll and the theme music starts up. This practice is an attempt to maintain viewer interest until the last frame. If the credits were shown on a simple black screen as they are in many films, viewers would tune out. The host, graphic designer, post production company, musical composer, editor, associate producer, and lastly, the most important person in the production process, the executive producer, all receive credit. Concluding the 50-minute show is a shot of Hawthorn fans waving brown and gold pom poms in celebration and a graphic denoting that the program is a Broadcom Australia production. The spectacle has ended.

The ARF highlights program format approximates that of the now defunct "The Winners." Although the highlights program targets foreign audiences and "The Winners" was produced for domestic consumption, they have numerous visual and aural similarities. Both start with striking images and up-tempo theme music; they replay two matches at length and present highlights of the other matches; they have a presenter to link the segments; they use tables and graphics to illustrate football statistics such as progressive score tables, team standings, and leading goal kickers; and they feature the marks and goals of the week. These observations support the conclusion that sportscasts follow tried and true formats no matter who produces them. The executive producer, as auteur, operates within restricted boundaries, but these limits assist him in communicating his football messages to the viewer. Audiences are accustomed to standard formats and rely on this structure to help them understand the program. The conventional format of programs in the sports highlights genre may really be a blessing in disguise.

5.1.8. Ads, Sponsors, and Recent Change

Before identifying the minor program changes from 1990 through 1992 to 1995, a few words on the subject of advertising and sponsorship. While the program's producer provides slots for ads, the ads are actually inserted by the telecaster. In the show analyzed for this thesis, TSN inserted 30-second ads for McCain Superfries and chocolate pies, Odour Eaters, Pepsi, McDonald's, Hyundai Sonata, the Canadian Centre for Drug-Free Sport, and a 60-second commercial for K-Tel's Conway Twitty's Hits. These ads reflect TSN's target audience of 18-50 year-old, well-educated males who have a combined household income of CAN$55,000 plus. The ad slots are organized around the following sequence: a close-up of Stephen Quartermain who relays some information, a graphic of two players frozen in action on an abstract background with the AFL logo prominent accompanied by theme music, the advertisement itself, another graphic similar to the first accompanied by theme music, and finally a close-up of Quartermain to introduce the rest of the show. The graphics and music signal to the viewer that a change is about to occur. Quartermain guides the viewer through the transition.

The ads were not subjected to semiotic analysis because (a) they were not constructed by the program producers (b) they follow an organizing logic quite different to that of the highlights package, and © they were not shown to the focus groups. Every facet of an ad is carefully constructed. Nothing is left to chance. On the other hand, while the highlights program is carefully edited, the producer has no control over the on-field activity. The game goes on oblivious to the producer's intent.

At present there is no corporate sponsorship of the ARF highlights program, and the likelihood of there being any in the near future is slim because the AFL lacks the infrastructure to pursue sponsors. Coca-Cola will sponsor the competition in Australia, until 2006, but their commitment is solely to domestic activities. In the past, Foster's beer has underwritten exhibition matches overseas and their television coverage, but this did not extend to the highlights package. The program's survival on channels such as TSN continues to rely on advertiser interest and low purchase price (see Section 6.1). If it loses money, it will be pulled by telecasters.

Changes in the highlights program over the last five years have been mainly cosmetic. There was no significant change when Vuecast took over production responsibilities from Broadcom in 1992 because the program had the same executive producer, David Barham. The program format has been a successful one which has received favourable feedback from purchasers. Slight changes were instituted in the areas of taped studio material, concluding music, camera positions, and graphics.

In 1990, early programs featured taped rule summaries to introduce international viewers to ARF. Players to watch were identified and the fitness components central to the game such as speed, strength, and skill were emphasized by the presenter (Stephen Quartermain). Responding to viewer feedback, Quartermain's black suit was replaced by brighter attire and his studio backdrop made more colourful. The marks and goals of the week segment was introduced in the fourth program and shows ended with a contemporary music videoclip entitled, "Australia's Favourite Sons." Adjustments during the year attempted to make the program more visually appealing.

Programs in 1991 continued to educate the audience with rule segments and player profiles. Theme music and an action montage replaced "Australia's Favourite Sons" as the concluding segment. By 1992 the format was standardized with few variations. The "man in white" segment featuring a senior umpire live in the studio proved to be popular with viewers and became a regular feature. Broadcom Australia Ltd. was the company responsible for production.

In 1993, Vuecast took over production duties and made greater use of studio guests. Collingwood star Craig Kelly was a special guest commentator during the finals series. A new studio backdrop, which had a painted crowd scene directly behind Quartermain and a player in action behind Kelly was introduced. The symbolism in this arrangement is self-evident. An additional camera position behind the goal posts was established by Channel 7 which covered the action. This angle enabled David Barham to use footage which tracked the ball through the posts and to show the crowd close-up. Another new feature was the promotion of AFL publications, videos, and merchandise. Viewers were provided with product shots, retail prices, and the AFL's address in Australia for purchasing inquiries. This represents the AFL's first hesitant steps in using the highlights program as a vehicle for memorabilia sales. Lastly, an obvious change in the visual imagery was the presence of a large, yellow "M" on either side of the red leather game balls. The world's biggest hamburger company had secured some novel signage.

Reflecting sweeping changes in the league, which included permission for the use of sponsor logos on team uniforms, 1994's international highlight programs underwent a facelift. The opening montage and monologue tell an inspired story of a land of dramatic extremes, sports lovers, and sporting heroes where the biggest stars are Australian Rules footballers. This hype is unusual for Australian productions and demonstrates the influence of American television sport values. Other additions include revamped graphics and borders which superimpose over the action a semi-transparent coloured film which displays information. Complementing this make-over is a new segment featuring the week's biggest hits, a topic made marketable by Don Cherry in Canadian hockey telecasts, but one which

the AFL has been reluctant to exploit in recent years because of negative feedback from overseas leagues.

There were more cosmetic changes in 1995. The opening patriotic monologue was replaced by action footage, graphic overlays and a new theme song entitled, "It's Unbelievable"! A floodlight football ground became Stephen Quartermain's new backdrop and the lead-in to ads featured game footage. One effect of these changes was to give the show a faster rhythm. The most significant additions to the program were a segment inviting viewers to purchase AFL publications from a Chicago address and a segment inviting viewers to travel to Australia for the 1996 'Centenary Grand Final'. These initiatives reflect the AFL's new promotional thrust.

The recent program changes seem to indicate a concerted effort by Vuecast and the AFL to make the program more palatable to North American audiences who are perceived as craving excitement. A resurrection of the rough, tough, Aussie footballer stereotype in the tradition of Mark 'Jacko' Jackson may be on the horizon. One will have to tune in to TSN September 1996, to see the next exciting installment in the ARF saga.

5.1.9. Summary

As the program is composed according to production codes and conventions, which emphasize spectacle, the messages embodied in the text reflect accepted ideology. Broad narrative themes such as who will win, teamwork brings success, football develops character, Australian nationalism and male mateship are posed in nonplay segments to set the scene for the football action. General messages such as ARF is entertaining, dramatic and athletic which are encoded in the program by the producer, are consistent with Australian cultural practice. Deviations from predetermined or cultural codes such as downplaying the uniqueness of ARF are not present in the show.

Specific messages identified by the semiotic analysis are not always totally consistent with those intended by the producer. While the analysis attempts to outline the preferred reading, some anomalies do exist. As this investigation also detailed the intentions of the producer, any irregularities are able to be acknowledged. For example, the opening montage of the highlights program contains a juxtaposition between the traditionally painted face of

an aboriginal and the brightly decorated face of two football fans. David Barham, the producer, said the message he was attempting to communicate was that Aboriginals are important players in the game of ARF. I believe that the connotation of these two shots is that football is indigenous to Australia and part of the national identity. These images also suggest that integration of Aborigines is naturalized. This study has identified the producer's preferred reading, one relevant reading, and will discuss readings by Canadian viewers. While there are more similarities than differences between the first two interpretations these need to be compared with Canadian readings to assess the degree of aberrance between encoding and decoding processes.

CHAPTER SIX - THE ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE INTERACTION: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Why is the highlights program telecast in Canada on The Sports Network (TSN)?

6.1.1. Overview

The bottom line in the question of why the highlights program is telecast by TSN in Canada or why a cable channel is the medium that brings the message to the viewer, is that it is economically viable to do so. TSN is a commercial enterprise whose prime objective is to make a profit for its owners, John Labatt Ltd. This is something the cable network does extremely well, registering sales of US $102 million and operating at a 28% margin for the fiscal nine months ended January 31, 1995 (Symonds, Malkin and McIcher, 1995). Any programming which does not pay its way is axed from TSN's sports lineup to make way for shows which attract sufficient viewer and advertiser interest. TSN maintains a delicate balance between income from subscriptions and income from advertising which in turn impacts the programming formula (Sparks, 1992). Australian Rules Football, with viewer ratings averaging around 40,000, still compares favourably to local programs such as TSN Inside Sports, a daily sports show which continues to be telecast despite dropping to a summer low of 38,000 viewers in 1994 (Houston, 1994).

While the bottom line at TSN is dollars and cents, the network also has a CRTC (Canadian Radio and Television Commission) licensing mandate to provide extensive Canadian programming and to provide events which the major over-the-air networks do not have room for. Clearly ARF is a niche sport appealing to a limited audience. TSN seeks to present a cross-section of sports which attract a varied audience to maintain ratings. In so doing, TSN fulfills its licensing mandate and makes a substantial profit at the same time.

While diversifying TSN's international programming, the ARF highlights package is also considered entertaining and easily accessible (MacIntosh, 1994). It is received by TSN's dish from a satellite transmission originating from Prime International which owns the North American rights to ARF. The highlights system program is recorded for rebroadcasting to the Canadian market via Anik Di (a geostationary satellite). There is no

direct contact between TSN, the AFL, or Vuecast because Prime's wholesaling role makes such communication unnecessary. The fact that the Australian organizations lack the infrastructure to develop international communication links results in an absence of feedback between the Australian producer of the program and the Canadian telecaster. This hands-off approach means that the highlights package is essentially accessed in a vacuum by TSN with no knowledge of AFL plans or priorities.

The effectiveness of the highlights program as a marketing vehicle for ARF in Canada is restricted by its distribution channel and absence of promotional follow-up. Without a feedback loop, the program cannot be specifically tailored to Canadian preferences; and without sufficient promotional materials, few people are well informed about the highlights package. The key to target marketing is meeting the product needs of a specified demographic grouping. Canadian consumers are quick to distinguish the difference between their preferences and those of American consumers. An informed television producer would be acutely aware of this distinction, especially the Canadian tendency like contact sports and game analysis.

What limited ARF promotion there has been consists mainly of two forms: a brief publication and exhibition matches. TSN has been involved in both activities. A limited number of booklets, entitled "Australian Football, A Fundamental Guide to the Game," were sent to TSN in 1990 and 1992 by the AFL for distribution to inquiring viewers. Although these free publications were snapped up by viewers, there has been limited follow up. The role of TSN in telecasting the Foster's-sponsored ARF exhibition matches within Canada has been previously discussed (Section 4.2). Foster's financed the whole operation to raise the profile of their beer in the Canadian marketplace. Matches in Vancouver and Toronto drew modest crowds ranging from 15,000-25,000 spectators.

One promotional initiative from TSN was the 1988 media tour of Mark 'Jacko' Jackson. He was brought to Canada by TSN and made an instant and lasting impression because of his apparent loutish personality and ludicrous statements. Australian Rules Football received a promotional boost but at some cost. Its popular image as a violent, lawless, free-for-all had unfortunately been confirmed by Jacko's antics. Andy

Lonsborough, President of the Canadian Australian Football Association (CAFA), believes this emphasis on violence attracted undesirable thugs to the game as evidenced by the number of player suspensions to the inaugural 1989 season. Obviously Jacko's tour was a mixed blessing.

6.1.2. A Compatible Relationship

While TSN is not the AFL's first choice as Canadian telecaster of the highlights program, it does present significant opportunities. Over-the-air networks like the CBC or CTV do have the potential to reach larger audiences, but TSN's viewer profile is more compatible to the ARF program's target audience.

Sixty-nine per cent of TSN's audience is male, 52% are males aged between 18 and 50, 13% have a college education, 20% are involved in management, and 45% live in a household where the combined income is greater than CAN $55,000 (MacIntosh, 1994). In short, TSN's viewers are well-educated and at the peak of their earning capacity. Conversely, the ARF highlights program targets 18-50 year olds with high disposable incomes who are interested in sport and have a limited knowledge of ARF. The similarity between these audience profiles means that TSN is an ideal medium for the AFL highlights package. The audience is receptive to the program format, the game itself, and are able to comprehend most of the action and commentary.

The expressed aim of the executive producer to entertain first, and educate second, was partially fulfilled. TSN enabled a compatible connection to be established between program and viewer which in turn resulted in respectable television ratings and a relatively secure programming niche. By catering to viewer preferences for new, exciting (or extreme) sports, the highlights program had a high entertainment value. It also had the capacity to educate the viewer on the basics of ARF because it was able to maintain viewer attention. Gaining the learner's attention is the first, and most vital, step in any educative process.

TSN facilitates the development of a relationship between program and viewer. The cable channel is the party which brings both entities together. While the relationship may not be a particularly strong or intimate one, it is a harmonious one with real potential. If the ARF highlights program received added promotion in either the form of printed or electronic

ads, more viewers might tune into the show. Evaluating whether the predicted ratings gain, and increased advertiser interest, would offset the extra promotional expense remains to be calculated. Both TSN and the AFL also need to ascertain whether an increased marketing effort in Canada is a sound strategy.

6.1.3. The Shaping of Meaning

The fact that the ARF highlights program is now telecast infrequently on TSN, a sometimes discretionary cable sport channel, means that the program has a low profile. Of the 9.5 million Canadian households with televisions, about 7.5 million receive either TSN or its French language equivalent RDS (Houston, 1994). More than 20% of Canadian television households do not receive any ARF programming, thus restricting the show's penetration into the television marketplace. Even when the programming is received, its infrequent and fluid schedule makes viewing a hit or miss affair unless the viewer carefully studies a television guides. The combination of these factors results in the highlights program having modest ratings and a low profile in comparison to broadcast productions such as CBC's, "Molson Hockey Night in Canada."

This low profile shapes the program interpretations made by Canadians. Australian Rules Football is generally perceived by TSN viewers as a novel, yet fast-paced and skillful sport which hold one's attention for short periods but cannot sustain prolonged viewing. This is because TSN viewers, while interested in sports and how they are played, lack the knowledge base and emotional attachment to ARF that is needed for extended or regular viewership. If one is unable to watch a sport regularly or understand how it is played, one could become disenchanted with it, passing it off as a time waster. Conversely, one could become a student of the game, actively pursuing more information. The 1994 average TSN viewer rating of approximately 40,000 suggests that few Canadians are students of ARF.

However, during investigations for this thesis, a hard-core group of Canadian ARF fanatics was identified. Six males employed in the computer industry, averaging 28 years of age, met regularly to watch and discuss the game amongst themselves and over the Internet. They organized the purchase of publications and merchandise from Australia and lobbied TSN for more programming. Sitting amongst these individuals, each wearing his

favourite team uniform and cheering wildly at some taped action, was a unique experience. This suggests that Australian Rules Football may have a cult following in Canada.

Another interpretation of ARF closely linked to its programming status on TSN and the uniqueness of the game is that it is neither real sport nor real drama. TSN's station identification segments feature the slogan, "Real sport, real drama, real TV - The Sports Network." This implies that all programming is authentic, a natural representation of sporting activity. However, ARF is sometimes placed by older viewers into the pseudo-sport category along with the World Wrestling Federation, American gladiators, and skateboarding. A recent article in The Edmonton Journal exclaimed that ARF is, "a game which has to be seen to be believed" (Shaw, 1994). Aussie Footy is considered by some baby boomers as something akin to farce, a carefully orchestrated sports parody where male machoism takes centre stage. Surely something so bizarre could not be "fair dinkum" (that is "real"). The sport has limited credibility among mature Canadian sports critics.

The highlights format accentuates the difference between ARF programming and, for example, live golf coverage and in so doing helps to reinforce the pseudo-sport image. By using montages featuring the frantic buildup to goal scoring, freakish marks, and crunching tackles, the ARF highlights program can be compared to the stylized, extreme action videos popular among generation x. The ARF highlights spectacle appeals more to TSN's 18-34 year old viewers, while extended live golf coverage attracts the 35-50 age group. Younger viewers interested in activities such as skating and snowboarding are not so quick to label ARF as farce and sports theatre. This point was brought out in the focus groups used in this study, where participants expressed respect for ARF as a legitimate sport.

According to Shaw (1994), TSN has achieved its original goal of becoming Canada's primary source for sports coverage and information. Information is something the producers of the ARF highlights program endeavour to provide, albeit as a secondary priority to entertainment. Brief rule explanations, game statistics and player profiles are presented periodically to educate the viewer, not to insult his/her intelligence. While an understanding of ARF adds to the enjoyment level, tedious explanations are neither wanted nor warranted by the TSN viewer. Knowledgeable viewers do not want to be taken step-by-step through

the game of ARF. Significant features of the game can be gleaned by the sports fan simply by concentrating on the action. The details they miss are for the most part provided by special taped segments in the highlights program serious.

As TSN viewers are sports enthusiasts, the opportunity exists for program producers to be more creative rather than following traditional entertainment conventions of quick editing and closeups. However, in the case of the ARF package and other cable shows, the producers have chosen to remain within the boundaries of the television sport genre. While innovation and change add variety, there is an inherent risk of turning-off viewers and advertisers if NBC's brief football experiment in 1990 is any guide. In an innovative move, NBC broadcast an NFL game without any commentary to test viewer reaction. This experiment was not favourably received. Since viewer ratings are the bottom line in any cable venture, producers tend to play it safe and stick to established practices. This absence of artistic expression may be disappointing but does allow a program like the ARF highlights package to be both appealing and comprehensible to TSN audiences. Even if the game itself is initially confusing, the international standard format and television production practices assist the viewer in reception, comprehension, and analytical processes.

6.1.4. Summary

There is nothing new in the ARF highlights program other than the game itself. As a result, it can be telecast on TSN and draw moderate ratings for a niche sport. TSN's mandate and the viewers it attracts provide the highlights package with a compatible channel through which the Aussie Footy product can be distributed to and consumed by Canadians. While the TSN-ARF relationship is mutually beneficial, it is not perfect; nevertheless, it is the best the Australian stakeholders can hope for given the current level of sponsorship, promotional resources, and marketing effort. This situation should improve once the strategies outlined in the 1994 AFL five-year marketing plan take full effect.

6.2 How do Canadians interpret the ARF highlights package?

6.2.1. Introduction

As most Canadians experience Australian Rules Football through the international highlights program, it is a key component in the meaning-making process. However, one

cannot assume that the messages encoded in the program by the Australian producer will be uniformly interpreted by Canadian viewers. The viewers bring their own culture and personality to the program in order to make sense of it (Hoijer, 1992). Connections are made between previous experiences and the viewing experience presented by the highlights program. As Morley (1986) points out, viewers makes meanings that are relevant to them at a particular time. These may well vary from those intended by the producer.

The meaning of the international highlights program was not something totally encapsulated in the show, awaiting discovery by the viewer (Buckingham, 1987). Rather, meaning was determined by active negotiation between the viewer and the program, where the former retained control of the process. Viewers constructed their own interpretations based on their skills and dispositions. They were not at the mercy of the television producer. He did not manipulate their attitudes and behaviour. The consumption of television is an active process which involves the skills of processing, interpreting, and evaluating information.

It is also important to note that the constructions of meaning involved interpersonal activity. Even if the initial viewing experience was in isolation, the program was often discussed with others until tentative interpretations were formed. While these interpretations were quite varied, there were also readings shared by groups of individuals. Expressed simply, the meaning process involved the viewer watching a program, creating certain impressions based on previous experiences, expressing these to others, and engaging in analysis. Something which is initially sensed was translated into words. Any divergences the viewer made from the original program reception represented a distortion of the initial experience - but this study focuses on perception rather than physical reality. One of the selection criteria for focus group participants was that they had encountered the highlights program but were not regular viewers. Participants theoretically did not have a personal investment in their relationship with the program and, as a result, group discussion was uninhibited. This situation benefited the researcher because it facilitated the tracing of ideas or themes expressed in the discussion to particular events in the program. Interpretations

were not disguised by an insecure participant, and insight was gained into how the viewer read the program.

Interestingly, this critical viewership did not yield a large number of different interpretations which lends weight to the argument that television messages are polysomic rather than pluralistic (Hall, 1980). This means that the set of viewer readings were finite rather than endless because they were limited by the viewer's culture, personality, and the television text itself. Skills and strategies used to make sense of the program appeared to be shared by the viewers. Clearly any investigation of readings should focus on what the viewer does with the program, not what the program does to the viewer. The focus of control always remained with the viewers as they construct their own meanings.

6.2.2. First Impressions

One of the most revealing discussions in the focus groups occurred when participants were asked to express their initial impressions of Australian Rules Football. Descriptors such as barbaric, physical, and lawless were used, but Australian Rules was inevitably compared with rugby union. While the playing of rugby union is concentrated in the western provinces, it does have a national media profile. The Canadian team acquitted themselves well in the 1995 rugby World Cup competition and the sport continues to grow at the grass roots level. However, in comparison to Canadian football and soccer, rugby is perceived as a more brutal sport where injury rates are high. This perception may explain the viewers' connection between ARF and rugby.

The comparative process began when focus group participants distinguished certain signs in the program based on previous encounters with similar shows. Next they made comparisons with ones that stood out in their mind. For example, one participant believed, "that it is similar to rugby, just a lot rougher and with a different type of tackling." Other participants actually thought ARF was rugby until they saw all the kicking. Viewers have preferences, expectations, and use these to form a comparative opinion of the show they are watching. Readings are made by a comparison with numerous reference points internalized by the viewer (Fouquier, 1988).

The initial interactions between the highlights program and the predispositions of the viewer become the yardstick by which future encounters are judged. First impressions are often lasting impressions and are resistant to change. Throughout the 90-minute focus groups, comparison was continually made by participants between ARF and rugby:

> Physically tough like rugby and hockey ... Very similar to rugby although what do I know about rugby ... a combination of rugby and soccer ... highlights like the rugby show on TSN.

Australian Rules Football was not perceived as a totally unique sport but rather a hybrid of rugby and other sports.

Therefore, in summary the apparent agreement on the rugby comparison indicates that although viewer dispositions are internalized, they are culturally embedded. Canadian culture, sports encountered in Canadian society, attitudes developed toward television, and preferences for both sport and television all involve social interaction. These pre-existing social conditions influence impressions formed by Canadian viewers of the ARF highlights program. As a result, interpretations tend to be consistent over a period of time, spontaneously similar to each other, and seemingly free of external constraints (Fouquier, 1988).

The descriptors used by focus group participants in outlining their initial impressions had a stereotypical male quality. This is not surprising, because participants in both the focus groups and the football games were male. Words such as "violent," "physical," "lawless," "wild" were used and are commonly associated with male activity in Canadian society. There seems to be a readily accessible bank of male descriptors which the viewers drew. Expressing one's opinions and feelings is therefore limited by the language in use. An Australian might add the words "slugfest," "barney," and "shindig" to the descriptor list, all of which make little sense to a Canadian.

As meaning making is a dynamic process, interpretations often change as more messages are processed. After their initial impressions were expressed, focus group participants they were shown segments of the highlights program and asked for their

responses. These demonstrate an evolving process where the viewer continues to clarify his opinions on both the highlights program and the game of ARF.

6.2.3. The Introductory Segment

After the 4.5-minute introductory segment of the program, viewers had formulated more questions than opinions in an effort to make sense of what they saw. In order to synthesize the messages they were receiving, viewers wanted to know:

- What are the night and day competitions?
- How do you calculate the ratios and percentages?
- Who are the teams?
- How do you score goals?
- Why do they give injury statistics?

Viewers needed more information to help them fully understand what was happening. Some questions were answered in the course of the program, some were not. It was this failure to access information that participants identified as one of the main reasons they did not watch the highlights program regularly. If one does not understand what is going on in a sport program, one tends to lose interest and start channel flipping. Of the observations made by participants, most seemed like the viewer was thinking aloud.

The statement, "... they are as revered as hockey players" shows the viewer linking the fan support of ARF with that of the NHL. Other comparisons were made with sports programs and with sports in general:

- What I was thinking about too, was I couldn't believe you got suspended for four games just for tripping. Harsh penalties when you see what is going on.
- The training regimens, like punching a bag, things like that seem pretty archaic ways of getting into shape for Aussie Rules Football.
- I'm comparing this with soccer. In soccer, the highlights only shows goals, goals, goals, where this shows hits, catches, and I think there were only actually two goals we saw.
- The commentary on this program really gives you the important information and cuts out the B.S. ... I find that personally quite refreshing.

Viewers were actively making connections between previous experiences and the new viewing encounter. This gave rise to judgements based on predispositions which directed the viewers' attention to certain aspects of the program. A few viewers chose to focus on the program format, but most concentrated on the game of ARF.

A hierarchy of program components was established by the viewer. As selection criteria ensured focus group participants were interested in sports and not involved in television production or marketing, an emphasis on the game is understandable. Other than opinions on the commentary and the comparison with soccer programs, there was no discussion directly after the introduction on features of the 4.5-minute segment. While program format was not a common topic of discussion, techniques used may have brought the game to the forefront. Producers endeavour to make a seamless program where the technology does not detract from the sport. Viewers did not focus on the program format, which could mean that the producers attempt at creating a transparent show which would not draw attention to itself was successful.

6.2.4. The Game Play Segment

The next footage shown to the focus groups consisted mainly of game play where protagonists engaged in battle until one emerged victorious. As the viewers had received a grounding in ARF from the introductory segment, questions after the game play were fewer in number. Nevertheless, questions about the scoring, injury statistics, and individual teams persisted because these were considered important by some viewers. They wanted them answered so that they could make sense of the images and sounds they were confronting.

Questions on scoring are understandable, because the only way teams can win is by accumulating the most points. Knowledge of certain teams enables the viewer to establish points of identification with certain players. However, the preoccupation of focus group viewers with the injury statistics is harder to understand. Their listing in game coverage may be novel, but there is more to viewer interest in them than pure curiosity. For some it confirmed their belief that ARF is a violent sport where the possibility of physical injury is very high. This is despite the fact that all of the injuries listed were minor, such as sprained ankles, bruised or (corked) thighs, or fractured fingers. One viewer commented,

- So injuries are part of the game, the nature of the game. Is this unusual?

Another observed,

- The announcement of the injuries is usually not part of sport highlights nor are the injuries listed for one game.

It appears that viewers were attempting to ascertain the importance of injuries in the overall scheme of things. Some assumed that because the program highlighted the injuries, they must be an important factor. Evaluative comments and detailed observations were beginning to be made in the group discussion after the game replays. After becoming more familiar with the game and making connections with previous experiences, viewers appeared more comfortable and confident in formulating opinions. Some commented on the skills displayed in the game:

- One thing I really liked about the game is the ultimate sports combination of hands and feet.
- I was impressed by the skill level . . . We see guys running laterally at 90° then hooking the ball 40 metres through the posts.

Others spoke of the manliness displayed:

- It does seem very macho.
- I thought after the guy scores it looks macho to shove someone or he gets shoved by someone. I guess that may be the nature of the sport.
- A little after the whistle type stuff which I didn't anticipate. It's an accepted part of the game, much like hockey I guess.

A few viewers were adjusting their first impressions:

- I understand more about the rules and it doesn't seem as violent or as rough. It seems quite safe, where you are not allowed to tackle in certain situations.
- It's funny. I could have sworn that the last pieces of Australian Rules Football that I'd seen was a lot more violent. I saw a lot more finesse in the game this time.

Interpretations were progressively being galvanized based on the viewer's most recent encounter with ARF.

6.2.5. The Concluding Segment

The next program segment viewed by the focus groups contained more game highlights and the concluding part of the show. Contests were resolved and loose ends tied up. Viewers continued to ask questions about basic rules and scoring, but evaluative statements were more prevalent. The "man in white" segment was particularly well received:

- The referees' business, that's really different to what I'm used to and maybe some other sports in other countries could learn from that to have the referees on national television justifying their decisions.
- It's nice to see the part where they talk to the referee, explaining some of their calls. You never see that. Bring on a NHL ref and ask, Why didn't you call the tripping?
- And then I thought in the programming, the episode with the man in white was quite distinctive and I thought pretty good.

As the "man in white" was quite novel, it caught the attention of viewers and met with their approval. One viewer felt that such a segment would be appropriate for NHL referees on the "Molson Hockey Night in Canada" telecast.

Other officials in ARF were singled out for attention by viewers. The goal umpires in their white lab coats and fedoras were contrasted with the players:

- It is still a fairly rough and tough sport, but here you've got referees dressed in white and long pants, their hats whatever, they look really dressed up. It's way at the opposite end.
- The thing that caught my eye was the guy, the end zone ref I suppose you'd call him, and the contrast between that and the nature of the game.

Signals used by the goal umpires were also labelled distinctive, flowery, and unique. The attire and actions of the referees were incongruent with those previously experienced by viewers and as such were perceived as eccentric and different. The game commentary also featured in the group discussions immediately following the program. Both the play-by-play and colour commentators frequently used colloquialisms in their description of the action.

Viewers had difficulty understanding them even though there were contextual clues. Viewer statements included:

- I enjoy the different way the language is used. And when he says there's another "ripper," you know, I think that's really interesting.
- I didn't understand the language that the commentators were using. That ball is a "scrubber." Scrubber sounds like a grubber in rugby which means the ball hits the ground and bounces awkwardly.
- The terminology is interesting, but if you don't think about it you get lost.

As defined previously a ripper, in fact, is a very good kick; and a scrubber is a very poor kick. It appears that neither the contextual clues nor the visual clues were sufficient for some viewers to accurately interpret what was happening.

One viewer drew a comparison with Don Cherry:

- A few of the calls like "gets his head taken off" and "the Bombers were nothing short of pathetic," these are things that Don Cherry might say. These guys were saying it in a gentlemanly way.

The colourful use of language in the highlights program attracted viewer attention, increasing the entertainment value of the show. The physicality of the sport also continued to be a hot topic of conversation with references to rugby, hockey, and player safety:

- I play rugby union and people say that's tough and it's really hard. It's their perception because they don't understand the game. Therefore, for instance, someone who's from Australia and has never seen hockey and they go alone, they might say it's particularly brutal. It's the same for Aussie Rules here.
- Yeah, it's almost, I guess, like hockey where you are going to have a brawl, you are expecting a fight.
- The brutality of the game is . . . I don't know. Is there another game where you can go up and punch the ball?
- Even now after having watched a little more and concentrated on it, it is still a fairly rough and tough sport.

After viewing the program, focus group participants were still inclined to place ARF higher on the brutality scale than both rugby and soccer. Colliding athletic bodies seemed to rate highly on the entertainment scale. General observations, comments, and questions made by participants during the viewing of the show tended to focus on the game more than the program. Little attention was paid to the highlights format, camera angles, cutting pattern, music used, etc., although all are important in the overall presentation of ARF. It appeared that viewers examined the content of the program and ignored the style in which it was displayed, (i.e., what was shown as opposed to how it was shown). As production techniques were taken for granted by viewers the program's producers were able to create the illusion of immediacy and realism. In other words it was a "fair dinkum" production.

6.2.6. Post Program Analysis

All the discussions analyzed to this point were open-ended, where the researcher avoided directing participants toward particular issues. The focus groups were free to define their own agenda for discussion, and participants could interact directly with one another. Obviously the actual program that participants viewed imposed some limitations.

The next phase of the analysis centres on a schedule of questions, where participants were asked to focus on particular issues. This helps clarify viewer opinion on a range of topics from the program itself to Australian culture. Some of the issues discussed would probably never arise in everyday conversation but are useful in identifying how viewers make sense of what they see. For these reasons, the next section resembles a group interview approach rather than an open-ended discussion.

6.2.6.1. The Program

The first group of questions focused on the highlights program itself, a topic all but avoided in the general discussions. When participants were directly asked what parts of the program stood out in their minds, previously-mentioned topics such as the commentary, "man in white" segment, and lots of action were identified - but little else. This low number of program highlights supports the notion that the viewers paid little attention to how the show was presented and may indicate just how pedestrian viewers thought the program format was. As one person pointed out,

- The format seems to be that it's a universal format worldwide . . . Nothing out of the ordinary, I didn't think.

Interestingly, there were a few preliminary suggestions on how the program could be improved:

- I think the camera angles throughout the game don't do justice to it. It sounds corny but they need a Goodyear blimp.
- They need more replays of the action from different angles.
- The commentators are somewhat dry. - They are not comical at all in terms of promoting their sport.

Obviously, the program was not as entertaining as viewers thought it could be. They have been conditioned by North American television sports fare.

Question two in this section asked participants how they would describe the program to a friend. Once again familiar descriptors were used: "barbaric," "physical," "wild" to name three, but few focused on the production process. Those comments continued to be a repetition of previous statements and were characterized by mild enthusiasm for the program:

- The commentary is interesting to hear, how they say things like a corked thigh and all that.
- The part that was out of the ordinary was when they showed the extended highlights of that really tight game between Collingwood and Melbourne. That was the best part of the whole thing as far as I was concerned.
- The show on Aussie Rules Football will give you the basics.
- It's fast-paced!

What is significant about the responses to the program questions is not so much what was said but what was left out of the discussion. The distinction between the program and the game was blurred. This provided insight into the viewer's relationship with the program, which was not a particularly close one. It certainly was not a viewing priority for participants and their nights were not planned around watching the show. Until this stage, there had been limited variation of opinion on topics discussed. All comments had been

received favourably within the groups and there was little controversy. Again this may be explained by the lack of personal effort invested in the relationship with the highlights program. The subject simply didn't stir great passions in the viewers. Nevertheless, there were differences of opinion on the actual purpose of the telecast. Most viewers thought it targeted the uninitiated:

- For those unfamiliar with the game for the most part. To get the major highlights.
- It's a high paced, fast game and they didn't show any of the blowouts. It was all action so that would draw new people to the sport.
- It looks like teaching a lesson with an intro and a conclusion at the end.
- This is obviously an educational program . . . Get people hooked on this weekly stuff and maybe they'll get into a full game.

A few thought it was a program for expatriate Australians:

- I think they wanna target Australians abroad.
- Well basically it's directed to people who know the game well.

A couple of viewers thought it would appeal to various groups:

- I think there's a bit of marketing on behalf of Aussie Rules as well as the fact they are trying to attract people who know the program too.
- Yeah, I think they are aiming to a wide variety of people as highlight packages do.

Although the format of the program was not at the forefront of viewers' minds, they were aware of what audience the show was directed at. Most thought it was targeting them (i.e., young males who knew little about ARF), which you would expect from an international highlights program. It was the relevancy of the program, not any real vested interest, which helped maintain the viewers' attention.

6.2.6.2. The Game

The topic of the next three questions was the game of ARF, something which the viewers clearly paid close attention to. In question one, viewers were asked what messages were communicated by the program about ARF. One common message was that this is a

fast-paced, action-packed and skillful sport (something commented on in previous discussions):

- It's fast-paced and it's based on footwork and marking. Canadians would have a hard time with this as would Americans.
- There's lots of action!
- Skill, big time skill. You've got the jumping, kicking, passing, all the things there.
- The skill of kicking something that shape with either foot, that is, actually amazing when you think of it.

There appeared to be, however, some changes in opinion on the physical nature of the game. Australian Rules Football was initially labelled brutal by some viewers; but after examining more game footage and comparing it with sports such as rugby and hockey, they adjusted their perception of the game:

- I wouldn't emphasize the brutality at all, or at least on what I saw today, and that's a reversal of what I thought in the beginning.
- Well I think they emphasized the aspects that there are rules and it isn't the barbaric sport that we thought.
- It's actually quite a bit cleaner and safer, now that I've watched this and I compare it to North American football. This actually seems tame.

First impressions changed after the viewer interacted with the program. These changes were also a reflection of the established viewing patterns of participants. Previously, most gave the program only a passing glance and did not study its contents carefully, but as a focus group participant they examined the telecast much more intently. Actions perceived as violent and lawless were now interpreted as simply physical and somewhat rule bound.

To gain an idea of the viewers' true understanding of ARF, they were asked to outline how to play the game and what rules they thought were the most important. Many viewers identified the tackling rule as the key to the game, especially if an individual wished to play ARF without the continual risk of serious injury:

- I think the foul rule, like not tackling the man without the ball, is a given.

- The first thing I would do is the rule on tackling to ensure safety.
- The technique of tackling is important.
- Something on the hitting is very warranted as far as I'm concerned, so it doesn't seem brutal.

How to score was also perceived as important because the team with the greatest points is the winner:

- Maybe how to actually score is needed.
- You need the scoring rules. You can't score like rugby. They all have to be kicked.
- Well I'd talk about tackling, how to score and bouncing the ball as my three rules.

Other rules which received some attention were the holding the man rule (probably because it was highlighted in the "man in white" segment) and the 15-metre rule because it appeared to be randomly enforced. Although most viewers were not able to describe the details of the rules, they were nevertheless capable of discerning which ones appeared to be important. One rule vital to the game which was not identified by viewers is the rule prohibiting passing. If throwing were permitted, ARF would have a very different look.

Next, viewers were asked to identify the appealing and non-appealing features of the game. Their initial comments suggested that viewers would list more positive than negative features, and this is exactly what happened. Positive features included the continuous action, kicking skill, and body contact.

- Constant action - no break!
- It's nonstop. There's never really any down time.
- There was one kick, 57 yards or something, and the guy was thinking hammer foot hank. The kicking I think was pretty neat.
- I guess from a male perspective it had a gladiatorial appeal to it.
- The contact is really good. You are getting tackled if you get the ball. It's like good hockey and good football--very appealing to me.

Once again there is evidence of the transparent nature of the telecast. The producer deliberately eliminates any slow passages of play and focuses on the well-executed goal kicks and effective tackles. Essentially the viewers' attention is directed to certain exciting components of the game. One aspect of the game which the production emphasizes but was not mentioned by viewers is the mark (i.e. catching the ball after jumping off the ground). This skill is considered by knowledgeable fans to be the most spectacular element of the whole game, yet it was overlooked by the focus groups.

Features identified as non-appealing by the groups were the seemingly disorganized play, the difficulty in following the game, and the lack of strict rule enforcement by referees:

- I'm kind of waiting for the plays . . . Athletes make decisions on the spur of the moment and we are not used to that, and that's probably where I lose interest in the game.
- It seems a lot more unorganized, I guess.
- Sometimes it looks sloppy. I kinda appreciate a well-designed set play here or there. At some points, you know, it just seems like a stupid mish mash.
- You get very few replays. You don't have a telestrator or anything to show this guy goes here, it just goes. It's hard to pick it up on your own.
- What I said earlier was about not being able to see the whole picture so that you can't see a lot of the strategies being set up.
- If there's anything negative, I would say tighten up the rules. They need to tighten up the rules so they don't make 25-30 metre runs.

These comments are closely related and reflect the viewers' preference for sports involving the execution by players of a comprehensive game plan designed by the coach. In games such as basketball and Canadian football, coaches attempt to control the play from the sidelines. Australian Rules Football relies more so-called player intuition and spontaneity because once the team takes the field, the coach's tactical options are very limited. There are also great distances over which to communicate strategies and timeouts do not exist. As one viewer explains,

- Most Canadians are bred on sport where everything is timed. Rules are very much part of the game. There's always a stoppage where plays are set up and you see what outcomes are possible. This is a game which is always flowing.

The stop-start nature of Canadian football also provides the opportunity for both commentators and home viewers to analyze and re-analyze the action. The practice of second-guessing the coach or the player is common among viewers because it adds to the enjoyment of the television experience. There are no pauses for reflection either in the game of ARF or the highlights package. This can be a source of frustration for some viewers who enjoy being armchair critics.

6.2.6.3. Comparisons

Many opinions are formulated by comparing the new viewing experience with previous experiences. It appeared that focus group participants compared ARF to rugby and soccer, and the distinction between the game and the television program was continually blurry. The next three questions dealt directly with the comparative process and sought to clarify viewer positions.

When participants were asked what programs they thought were similar to the ARF highlights package, they identified "NBA Action," "Soccer Saturday," "Transworld Sports," and rugby highlights amongst others. Most of these shows are telecast on TSN with a few shows appearing on the major broadcast networks when scarce time slots are available. These narrowcast shows characteristically target 18-35 year old middle to upper income males who are interested in sports. The programs also tend to focus on one specific sport with only "Transworld Sports" following an eclectic sports magazine format. The reason most respondents gave for connecting the ARF telecast with these programs was the similar format:

- They highlight the best parts of the sport like the goals.
- TSN Soccer Saturday is similar . . . it's structured very similar.

Sports identified by the groups which are similar to ARF include the old favourites of rugby, soccer, and Canadian football. The only other sports to receive a mention were basketball and Gaelic football (a game of Irish origin):

- An obvious comparison is to rugby union. The physical nature of the game, the kicking, passing, and fluidity.
- I don't know. I still see in it more rugby, the way the players position themselves and go about things.
- The way the game is played is far closer to soccer. Getting the ball out wide, running off the ball, all that kind of stuff I definitely see.
- What I do see is a great similarity with Canadian football with a bit more excitement involved.

However generally, the combination of skills and rules used in ARF were considered unique by the viewers:

- I think the facts that there are zero stoppages are different.
- It's a mix of about four I see, soccer, rugby, basketball, and American football, I guess.
- Even the technique of kicking the ball is very different.

In the last question of this section, viewers were asked for an evaluation of the program. While the game itself appeared to be the prime focus of attention, viewers had several suggestions for improving the highlights program. The key recommendations included a more vibrant presenter and the need for more player profiles and rule explanations:

- Kind of needs that character to get things going, a kind of Don Cherry. That's what we've all grown up with. We like that colour.
- A celebrity commentator, maybe a little bit off the wall like John Candy or Jacko!
- They could add player profiles to introduce the players.
- Before each game, introduce the star of the game.
- Something should make reference to the basic rules. The first time I saw it I thought they were madmen.

- For me I need more explanation, not just 30 seconds.

"Jacko," the ARF-playing larger than life character, left a positive impression upon viewers after his North American media tour in 1989. He was perceived as a potential colour commentator. Although player profiles were not part of the program viewed by the focus groups, such segments are now a standard feature of the highlights program. The profiles assist in establishing a closer relationship between the viewer and the program by establishing a personal touch. Lastly, rule explanations are more frequent in programs telecast early in the season. The particular program used in the focus groups was for round 20 and did not feature extended rule explanations. Once again these segments are important because they assist the viewer in understanding the program and making sense of the game.

Other improvements suggested by the groups were show more of the fan involvement, include a segment on the best tackles and hits, and more full-field shots. Interestingly the 1994 programs experimented with a biggest hits feature along with the marks and goals of the week segment at the conclusion of the program. North Americans seem to enjoy the physical aspect of sport and the new segment accommodates that preference.

In contrast to the program improvements suggested by the focus groups were a series of compliments praising the bare-bones production values. This praise was in direct contrast to the need for added glitz recommended by some viewers. Some respondents were tired of the standard, Hollywood style sports production where style supersedes substance:

- A bare-bones program like that doesn't distract you from what the program is. You don't have a lot of people talking extraneously to the game where it's not needed.
- It's not glitzy. We've talked about the colour commentator. He was nuts and bolts. This is what it is and very down to earth, and I find that a lot more appealing than the glamour we have over here.
- As far as comparing it to other sports, I get a bit tired of all the hype all the time. I think it's almost getting to the point where its taking away from the sport.

It appears that these individuals thought the game was good enough to stand on its own and didn't require elaborate mediation. Other than the fact that the program is already heavily mediated, it is certainly true that the rating success of the show does depend on the quality of the product on display. Most viewers thought ARF was intrinsically exciting and entertaining, which is a real plus for the ARF and the producers of the highlight package.

6.2.6.4. Culture

The remaining questions dealt with cultural similarities and differences between Canada and Australia. The questions were very general and attempted to gain a snapshot of how the participants perceived the relationship between the two countries and how this might impact the reading of the highlights program. For this segment, the focus was directly on Canada and Australia. Question one asked participants for their perception of problems that might result from a program produced in Australia and telecast in Canada. Many quickly suggested that the use of game specific terminology and colloquialisms can cause confusion. A virtual glossary of terms is needed for Canadian viewers to fully understand the meaning of the action:

- Terminology is a problem, but it depends on what their mandate is. If their mandate is to try and bring the sport and try to get it going here, they are probably not going about it the best way. If the mandate is just to put an hour of this on TSN and get some commercials in there, then it's not a bad product actually.
- You need to edit in a Canadian commentator to explain to the people what's going on.
- It's hard to tell what is sports terminology and what is Australian lingo. I couldn't really tell the difference.
- Initially it takes five minutes to get used to the accent, but then the terminology is more troublesome.

Some participants suggested that while the different linguistic code makes understanding difficult, it is in fact part of the appeal of the program:

- Very colloquial and very fresh for us, I think.

- It gives it charm and uniqueness.
- "Fair dinkum" -- that was good. But that's entertaining, I think, because then it reminds you of where it is coming from.

The distinctive language separates the ARF highlights program from other highlights packages and adds to its entertainment value. However, as suggested by one viewer, if the mandate is not just to entertain but to promote participation, the lack of viewer understanding is a drawback.

When the focus groups were asked what messages they were receiving about Australian culture from the highlights program, the response was interesting. It appeared that viewers actively selected information which confirmed pre-existing stereotypes. Opinions about Australia were unchanged by the viewers' encounter with the highlights program. This is in contrast to the change in opinions specifically on ARF. Some messages received included:

- They are macho and have long hair and big biceps.
- Aussies probably like sport, you know, like us. Forty-one thousand people go to watch a game.
- It's a game of the people--somehow that is coming through.
- I did notice, not the indigenous people, but it's played mainly by white people. In North America we are seeing so many sports dominated by Afro-Americans.
- I think you get the renegade spirit of Australia coming through in the game.

A certain stereotypical profile of Australian males appears to prevail (i.e., they are sexist, racist, anti-authoritarian, sports lovers). Opinions were based on subjective criteria and feelings. Viewers could not specifically identify how they were receiving certain messages of what in the program prompted certain feelings. Some had trouble finding the right words to express their thoughts accurately, but it seemed they supported the concept that one gets to know a country by the games it plays. Lastly, the focus groups were asked what links they saw between Canada and Australia and what elements the two countries had in common. If there is a strong affinity between the two countries, the chances of a successful introduction

of a sport from one country to the other are much improved. Strong cultural connections form a firm basis for exchange between countries.

The link identified most frequently was a relaxed attitude to life, certainly less intense than that demonstrated by Americans:

- Neither place takes things too seriously. It's pretty laid back.
- I think from what I can tell most people are very open in a different way to the Americans, where they always talk about themselves. I think that Australians and Canadians are much more friendly. Every time I run into them they seem to be having a good time.
- I always thought there was this laid back attitude in both.
- We are both very relaxed cultures. We are easy to get along with, not arrogant like Americans.

Viewers tended to use America as the yardstick against which Canada and Australia were compared. Canadians want a distinct, separate identity, not a homogenous North American identity. Whereas Americans are perceived as living to work and Australians working to live, Canadians are between these opposite ends of the work ethic continuum.

The shared British heritage was also a popular discussion point along with the love of sport and similar demographic and geographic features. As one time British colonies, both Canada and Australia have had to carve out their own niche in world politics:

- We have our Commonwealth past and somehow we are tied or connected.
- I thought there was always this brotherhood, sisterhood between Canada and Australia.
- I think there's always been, well, a type of connection. The Commonwealth Games have been in Australia and that type of thing, and I think a lot of Canadians would like to travel there.
- Historical connections--both former British colonies and it's about the same type, a place for the British to send their unwanted.
- They have enthusiasm for contact sports.
- I can't see similar terrain but there is a whole bunch of vast land.

- There's a lot in common. Population is just one, the fact of common descent in general . . . problems with Aboriginals and also there's two unique sports, hockey and ARF.
- Their place in world politics is fairly similar. Population-wise is within, I think, five million. Natural resource-based economics and huge, wide-open spaces.

It appears that the respondents felt that Canadians have more in common with Australians than their nearest neighbours, the Americans. Their common British ancestry and similar position on the world stage are also firm bonds. Although the relationship between Canada and Australia could not be considered close, it assists television viewers in deciding what perspective a particular program is coming from.

6.2.7. Summary

David Barham, the executive producer of the highlights program, creates what he believes is an entertaining sport package which also educates and informs new international audiences. Many participants in the focus groups agree that he reached this objective:

- I don't think they are marketing it to try to get people to play. I think they are just marketing it to make people aware there is a game and what it is like.
- Obviously an attempt to educate, which was good.
- I found the program to be different in that they concentrate more on the game and team aspects than the elaborating of player profiles.
- They want to capture your attention with Aussie Rules Football . . . They are just giving you the best bits.
- It's exciting . . . There's a lot of action going on and generally a good game to watch.

Barham attempts to 'make it comfortable' for the viewer and take them on an armchair ride through a unique form of Australian culture. The producer's effort to give Canadians a feel for ARF, boots and all, is moderately successful.

However, some viewers think Barham is off the mark:

- I'm getting the impression that it is designed as an info program for transplanted Australians . . . I'm not getting the impression so much that they are trying to attract a new crowd in Canada.
- I get a sense they are targeting expatriate Aussies.

Barham avoids material superfluous to football in order to maximize the amount of game play in the program. While the telecast is fast-paced, entertaining and somewhat informative, some viewers are confused by the haphazard action and commentary which used colloquialisms and nicknames. They need more background information to understand what they are seeing. For this reason, some viewers think the program is pitched at fans rather than newcomers to the sports.

However, Barham clearly does not leave Canadian viewers to work out ARF for themselves. The "man in white" segment highlights important rules, and short rule explanations illustrated by graphics do appear in other programs in the series. There is always a presenter to guide the viewer through the show and clarify certain points. While the program's main focus is entertainment rather than ARF, Barham is also aware that if the viewers are lost, they will soon lose interest in the proceedings. Barham subscribes to the KISS method (i.e., Keep It Simple, Stupid) of production. Unfortunately, this approach was not sufficient to adequately inform some viewers.

The success of the program in Canada is difficult to judge. While the number of shows telecast has been reduced because of low ratings and lack of advertiser interest, the president of Canadian Australian Football League believes it has brought mixed results:

> Canadians enjoy it although it looks lawless. ... It tended to attract thugs to our competition, but now things are tidied up, (Lonsborough, 1994).

While the highlights program has raised the profile of ARF and contributed to participation in the game in Canada, it has also provided a no-rules message and clearly not distinguished Aussie Rules from rugby. It has succeeded in entertaining a small portion of the population but not in educating them. The step to mass Canadian interest and participation in the sport remains a quantum leap.

The next chapter outlines the conclusions and implications of these findings. According to the semiotic analysis and audience interpretations, the primary aim of the program producer to entertain has been achieved. The secondary aim, to educate and inform, was not fully accomplished. As the producer's understanding of the program is similar to (but not exactly the same as) that of Canadian viewers, the degree of deviation between encoding and decoding moments is minimal. This has important implications for all parties involved. The sport of ARF has been abstracted by television to present messages of entertainment, spactacle and excitment. Viewers are massaged by the images not stimulated at the cognitive level. Viewing of the ARF highlights program can become a "pleasure" experience rather than a "football" experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This case study, analyzing the production of a television sport program in Australia and its consumption by cable sports viewers in Canada found a minimal degree of distortion between encoding and decoding moments. Consequently, the results of this investigation cast doubt on the assumption that a sport program originating in a foreign land produces different meanings for North American audiences. The findings also point to the importance of collective experience, (i.e. individual and cultural), not just physical setting, in the construction of meaning.

The producer uses personal intuition and cultural experience to create an Australian Rules Football highlights program which targets characteristic TSN viewers, 18-50 year old males who like sports, and who use their cultural experiences to interpret the Australian program. Both producer and consumer interpret the program from the position of males who have similar backgrounds and who operate within a transnational commercial culture. This synergy is what facilitates the encoding/decoding processes and compensates for any distortion caused by physical separation, (i.e. different countries).

An important message for researchers is that assumptions about the construction of meaning in sports television should not be made until encoding and decoding processes are subjected to extensive analysis. This is especially relevant in the investigation of a sport televised in different countries, because common sense assumptions abound. Some researchers are quick to identify oppositional moments or conversely evidence of a flattening of cultural differences without conducting an appropriate critical analysis. Just because ARF was plucked from its original context and flashed across Canadian television one cannot assume that contrary imagery and meanings result. This study suggests that although there are cultural differences between Canada and Australia, there are also many cultural similarities which shape communication and meaning making.

Critical studies suggest that while televised sport is an area in which meanings are contested, viewers use socially accepted ideas to help understand everyday situations. This study recognizes that certain ideological processes prevail in Canada and Australia which shape TV sport and male cultural experience. For example, because of a long historical

process, men's sport has a greater following than does women's sport. Men's sport prevails in the media while women's sport is marginalized and trivialized. Because televised men's sport attracts male audiences, the TV industry targets advertisers of primarily men's products, a very lucrative market. As a result, a program featuring an esoteric male sport such as Aussie Footy can be telecast by a Canadian cable network whose viewers are predominantly male to secure advertising revenue. The ideologies represented here have been labelled masculine superiority (McKay, 1992) and audience commodity (Sparks, 1992). The final outcome is that TSN's slogan, "real sport, real drama, real TV," is referring primarily to male sport (Sparks, 1992).

Hegemony theory has recently been criticized because, amongst other things, the comparative logic it employs to study sports in cross-cultural settings fails to identify important cultural differences in their meaning (MacAloon cited, in Morgan, 1994). Despite this attack, the concept of hegemony, which encompasses the processes described earlier, has merit. It can explain how individuals voluntarily agree to use generally accepted practices in the shaping and interpreting of televised sport. Producers do not deliberately protect the interests of male capitalists and there are opportunities for the insertion of oppositional material. However, hegemony theory does sometimes focus on the "big picture" to the detriment of individual experience. This study demonstrates that there is some leeway in how individuals interpret TV sport.

The AFL has been accused by some groups of pandering to television and allowing a working-class sport to be appropriated by big business (Wilson, 1990). Evidence for this criticism has been cited from the earthbound trend in the modern game and the perceived reluctance of the AFL to heed the wishes of constituent clubs. Advancing the ball by handballing rather than long kicks does facilitate TV coverage, and despite the recent protests by Fitzroy, the AFL is subtly pressuring the club to merge with another. However, this does not prove that footy's soul has been sold to television or big business. It does demonstrate that the AFL operates within a social context which is supportive of commercial expansion. Despite small pockets of resistance, recent decisions by the AFL to attract TV coverage and sponsorship have been perceived as making good sense. This case study shows

that when evaluations of organizational decisions are attempted, they need to considered in the social context in which the decisions were made. The AFL's decision to produce an international highlights program did not occur in a vacuum, it was not pre-determined by capitalist ideology, nor was it an isolated creative moment; but it was certainly shaped by a specific economic and political context.

Although this study outlines the important role of individual choice (human agency) within the limits of social context (political, economic, and ideological structures), like previous research it found the latter to be more important in shaping meaning. While the program producer makes some creative choices and works within financial and time restraints, what appears on the screen reflects industry codes and conventions which highlight spectacle. These were not dictated by a powerful individual or a production manual but were part of subconscious practice. The AFL program tells the story of the weekend's round in a highly edited, entertaining manner characteristic of all sports highlights shows.

Viewers of the highlights program construct meanings which are relevant to them at a particular time, but they are shaped by the delivery medium and the polysemic text. The program's low profile on TSN (which tends to trivialize ARF), and the carefully composed image and sound sequences influence the cognitive meaning-making process. As there is also little evidence of the viewer interacting or playing with the program (the only way a viewer could directly influence the program is to turn it off or provide delayed feedback to TSN), cultural determinants seem to outweigh individual choice in the decoding process. The producer is the driving creative force in the process, but the practices he uses can not be separated from the Australian context in which he works. Future research needs to investigate production contexts to assess how much of the encoding process may be attributed to human agency. This will shed light on how specific messages are created and from what (or whose) standpoint sport is covered.

Viewers did not construct an infinite number of readings of the highlights program. They could only decode according to discourses available to them at that particular time and,

as a result, interpretations were subject to change. Investigations of the consumption of televised sport need to be updated to track any changes in constructed meanings.

In practical terms, some specific implications for the AFL, TSN, and the program producer emerged from this study:

- The highlights program has the potential to attract significantly more TSN viewer and advertiser interest if it were vigorously promoted. There are revenue opportunities in Canada which the AFL has not fully explored, although the strategies outlined in the 1994 marketing plan are a positive step.
- Based on the success of the Foster's Cup, the future involvement of a corporate sponsor in Canada would give ARF a promotional and financial boost.
- Canadian audiences for ARF will continue to be predominantly male as long as current production and telecasting practices are used. The highlights show is not perceived as family entertainment.
- While audience demographics and psycho-graphics are useful statistics, they reveal little about how people interpret television sport. An understanding of this process (i.e. what imagery the program creates) could assist the producer in making more expedient production decisions.
- While Canadian viewers are entertained by ARF, some lack a full understanding of the game as evidenced by the following comments: "Australian Rules Rugby-what a brutal game!" "It should be called Aussie No Rules!" "And what about those dudes in white coats? What are they doing?"

Despite the producer's efforts to educate the audience through special information segments (including the man in white series), some viewers continue to confuse ARF with rugby, fail to see evidence of rules, and do not understand the role of the goal umpires. It is therefore paramount that the producer persist with the educative process, approaching it from different angles such as using more replay analysis, because viewer interest can be sustained

if viewers understand what is going on. By the same token, as Barham suggests, one does not want to bore the viewer in the process.

Through the process of this investigation, certain strengths and weaknesses in the research methods adopted became obvious. Interviews of production and marketing personnel provided important insights into the encoding process but these would have been complemented by an ethnography of the precise encoding moment. Observing the production of the highlights program, the contribution of human agents can be identified and the temptation to position actions under the conventional practice rubric is avoided.

Procedures for semiotic analysis range from the highly technical to vaguely subjective interpretations, and there is confusion over how to apply techniques to televised sport. Although the connotations outlined in this investigation are subjective, they are based on extensive shot-by-shot analysis which defined what was denoted by the program. This shot analysis, while tedious, does assist in the identification of preferred readings and not just the tabulation of manifest content. However, a semiotic analysis should never stand alone and should be seen as a preliminary to audience research.

The use of focus groups to elicit the decoding moment was problematic. While focus groups were appropriate for the specific nature of the program investigated, once again an ethnography of the meaning-making process would have been beneficial. Observing the consumption of televised sport in private homes or public venues can illuminate the decoding moment. The researcher can also get a snapshot of the viewers' cultural experience.

A case study approach could help to complete the cross-cultural meaning-making puzzle. While generalizations about televised sport can not be made from examination of an ARF program, it nevertheless contributes to an understanding of the complex processes involved.

Finally, some general comments about methodology. As this investigation progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the separation of context, text, and readings into analytical units was artificial. Because of the network of interdependencies between encoding and decoding processes, there was a continual need for repetition and clarification. An analogy with a tripod can be made. Without each of the three elements, the whole

meaning-making structure collapses. There is no message unless someone interprets it. Moores (1990) believes that context, text, and readings should not be separated and that ethnographic and textual analyses should be combined. However, achieving this synthesis is a difficult task and remains a challenge for future research.

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Appendix I - Interview Guides

1. Australian Football League Marketing Manager Interview Guide

Topic 1 - Marketing Overview

1. What are the key features of the current domestic marketing plan? (Probe: How do these relate to the control of competition debt?)
2. One of the AFL's corporate aims is to achieve recognition of and participation in Australian Football in other areas of the world. How is this aim achieved? (Probe: What is the role of the marketing department?)
3. What are the major features of the current international marketing plan? (Probe: How does the highlights program fit into the plan?)
4. How did the business relationships between the AFL, Broadcom, and Vuecast begin? (Probe: What circumstances prompted these business unions?)

Topic 2 - The Roles of Broadcom and Vuecast

5. What has been the role of Broadcom in the marketing and production processes? (Probe: How might this change in the future?)
6. What has been the role of Vuecast in the production process? (Probe: How might this change in the future?)

Topic 3 - The Television Highlights Program

7. How is the program marketed in North America? (Probe: What is unique about this marketing strategy?)
8. Why was this program format selected? (Probe: What is the objective of the program?)
9. What feedback have you received on the program? (Probe: What changes have been made as a result of the feedback?)

Topic 4 - The Game

10. What aspects of the game do you want North Americans to appreciate? (Probe: How does the highlights program help achieve this?)
11. How has the game benefitted from the marketing of the highlights program? (Probe: What is the "bottom line" in this marketing exercise?)

12. What does the future hold for the game in Australia and overseas? (Probe: What role will cable and pay television play in the future?)

2. Broadcom Australia Production Controller Interview Guide

Topic 1 - Marketing Overview

1. What circumstances prompted the establishment of a business agreement with the AFL? (Probe: How does the agreement fit in with your corporate objectives?)
2. What has been the role of Broadcom in the marketing and production of football programming? (Probe: How will this change in the future?)
3. What are the major features of your current international marketing plan? (Probe: How does the highlights program fit into the plan?)

Topic 2 - The Television Highlights Program

4. How is the program marketed in North America? (Probe: What is unique about this marketing strategy?)
5. What is your business relationship with Prime and TSN? (Probe: What joint promotional activities are you involved in?)
6. Why was this program format selected? (Probe: What is the objective of the program?)
7. What feedback have you received on the program? (Probe: What changes have been made as a result of this feedback?)
8. Describe the production process for a typical program from beginning to end. (Probe: What aspects do you consider most important?)

Topic 3 - The Game

9. How does the game itself influence production decisions? (Probe: What problems are created by the game's flowing, fast-paced nature?)
10. What aspects of the game do you want North Americans to appreciate? (Probe: How does the highlights program help achieve this?)
11. How has the game benefitted from the marketing of the highlights program? (Probe: What is the "bottom line" in this marketing exercise?)

12. What leagues have been established overseas? (Probe: What support services are offered to them?)

3. Vuecast Pty Ltd - Executive Producer Interview Guide

Topic 1 - Production Overview

1. What circumstances prompted the establishment of a business agreement with the AFL? (Probe: How does the agreement fit in with your business objectives?)
2. What has been the role of Vuecast in the production of football programming? (Probe: How might this change in the future?)
3. What target audience is the program aimed at? (Probe: Who is actually watching the program overseas?)

Topic 2 - The Television Highlights Program

4. Why was this program format selected? (Probe: What is the objective of the program?)
5. How do you combine visual images with appropriate audio? (Probe: What is the role of commentary in the program?)
6. What feedback have you received on the program? (Probe: What changes have been made as a result of this feedback?)
7. Describe the production process for a typical program from beginning to end. (Probe: What aspects do you consider most important?)

Topic 3 - The Game

8. What aspects of the game do you want North Americans to appreciate? (Probe: How does the highlights program help achieve this?)
9. How does the game itself influence production decisions? (Probe: What problems are created by the game's flowing, fast-paced nature?)
10. How has the game benefitted from the production of the highlights program? (Probe: What role does marketing play in the whole process?)

4. The Sports Network Supervisor of Acquisition and Presentation Services Interview Guide

Topic 1 - Overview

1. Why was the highlights program originally added to TSN programming? (Probe: When was the decision made? How did the program fit in with programming objectives?)
2. Why was the ARF programming cut back in 1993? (Probe: What filled these vacant programming slots?)
3. How does the target audience for the program differ from audiences for similar programs? (Probe: Why does the program take over the rugby time slot in May?)
4. What contact have you had with the AFL, Broadcom, or Vuecast? (Probe: What is "Prime America's" role in marketing the program?)

Topic 2 - The Program

5. What feedback have you received on the program? (Probe: What market surveys or ratings have been conducted?)
6. What is your professional opinion of the program? (Probe: What changes would you like to see instituted?)
7. What other highlights programs do TSN telecast? (Probe: How do they differ from the ARF highlights program?)

Topic 3 - The Game

8. What aspects of the game do you think Canadians appreciate? (Probe: How does the program highlight these?)
9. What information do you have on Canadian participation in the game? (Probe: What is TSN's role in the promotion of ARF?)
10. What coverage did TSN provide for the exhibition matches in Vancouver (1987) and Toronto (1989)? (Probe: What corporate sponsorship was involved?)

Topic 4 - Australia

11. What other Australian programming have you telecast? (Probe: Which Australian organizations or individuals have worked with TSN?)

12. Cable television is a new phenomenon in Australia. What are the key ingredients for a successful cable sports channel? (Probe: What can Australian cable operators learn from Canadians?)

5. The Canadian Australian Football Association President Interview Guide

Topic 1 - Background

1. When was the CAFA's inaugural season? (Probe: How has the competition progressed since that time?)
2. What are your plans for the future? (Probe: Do you have matches against other leagues?)
3. What sponsorship does the CAFA receive? (Probe: How vital is this to the viability of the competition?)

Topic 2 - AFL

4. What support do you receive from the AFL? (Probe: How would you describe the relationship between the CAFA and the AFL?)
5. When have AFL teams played exhibition matches in Canada and who was involved? (Probe: What is the future of such matches?)

Topic 3 - Canadian Media

6. What competition coverage have you received from the media? (Probe: What coverage have you received from TSN?)
7. Why did TSN reduce the number of ARF highlights programs telecast in 1993/94? (Probe: What is your reaction to this?)

Topic 4 - Impressions

8. What do you think of the highlights program? (Probe: Is it a good promotional tool?)
9. What do Canadians think of the program and ARF in general? (Probe: Why are your players attracted to the sport?)
10. What can be done to improve the Canadian public's understanding of Australian football? (Probe: What should be television's role in this process?)

Appendix II - Semiotic Components

1. Definitions

Code - A particular system of rules and conventions that determines how signs are used and consequently how meaning is possible (McKay, 1991).

Connotation - uses the first sign (or denotation) as its signifier and attaches meaning to it, another signified, e.g. fade to black becomes the signifier and "the end" the signified.

Decoding - The process whereby an individual converts a text into messages which are meaningful to him/her.

Denotation - first order of significance, e.g. the sign fade to black has as its signifier the gradual disappearance of the picture to black on the screen, and as its signified simply 'black" (Seiter, 1987).

Encoding - The process whereby messages are converted into a code by producers of a text.

Message - the smallest unit of meaning that can have an independent material existence. A message must have a material existence in which at least two units of meaning, that is signs, are organized into a syntagmatic structure (Hodge and Kress, 1988).

Paradigmatic Category - a set of signs that are similar in that they may be substituted for one another according to the rules of combination, e.g. close ups are a set of signs based on subject-to-camera distance (Seiter, 1987).

Representation - The process by which abstract images, symbols, and ideas (e.g. sport) are transformed into concrete forms (e.g. media broadcasts of sporting events) (McKay, 1992).

Semiotics - In communication studies, semiotics is a method for analyzing verbal and non-verbal messages. The basic analytic unit is the sign which consists of the signifier (e.g. a word, object, or image) and the signified (i.e. a mental concept indicated by the signifier) (Abercrombie et al., 1988).

Syntagmatic Structure - a rule-governed combination of signs in space-time which form a message.

Text -A combining of individual messages into a unified whole.

2. Visual Sign Connotations

In an attempt to simplify the semiotic process, Berger (1982) produced the following table. While it tends to be superficial by stating the obvious, it is nevertheless a starting point for the shot-by-shot analysis.

Signifier (shot)	Definition	Signified
close-up	face only	intimacy/personalization
medium shot	most of body	personal relationship
full shot	full body of person	social relationship
long shot	setting and characters	context, scope, public distance

Signifier (Camera work and editing)	Definition	Signified
pan down	camera looks down	power, authority
pan up	camera looks up	smallness, weakness
zoom in	camera moves in	observation, focus
fade in	image appears on blank screen	beginning
fade out	image screen goes blank	ending
cut	switch from one image to another	simultaneity, excitement
wipe	image wiped off screen	imposed conclusion

(Berger, 1982: 38-39)

3. ARF Visual Codes

Play was followed continuously from the "prime position" which was opposite and above the half forward lines (see diagram attached). There was one main camera and one close-up camera at each of the two lines (i.e., four cameras). A personality camera was used sometimes to focus on a player, official, coach or spectator. (N.B. LS = long shot; MS = medium shot; CU = close-up).

General Play

Consist of three phases:

1. At the kick - MS of the player in possession.
2. The actual kick - LS shows the position of players.
3. The end of the kick - MS of the player in possession.

Marks

Sequence of three shots:

1. LS of the players positioning for the ball, camera zooms in and director cuts to
2. MS or CU of the player taking the mark and landing on the ground, frame is tight until the player disposes of the ball, cut to
3. LS of players positioning for the ball.

Goals

Sequence of seven shots:

1. LS shows the ball passing through the posts, cut to
2. CU of the goal umpire who signals a goal, cut to
3. CU of the goal scorer, cut to
4. MS of the crowd and a score graphic appears on the bottom of the shot, cut to
5. A replay of shots 1-3.

Centre Bounce or Boundary Throw-In

Sequence of three shots:

1. LS of the players positioning for the ball, cut to

2. MS or CU of the players tapping the ball down, camera pans to follow the player in possession, cut to
3. LS of the players after disposal of the ball.

Ad Breaks

Sequence of three shots:

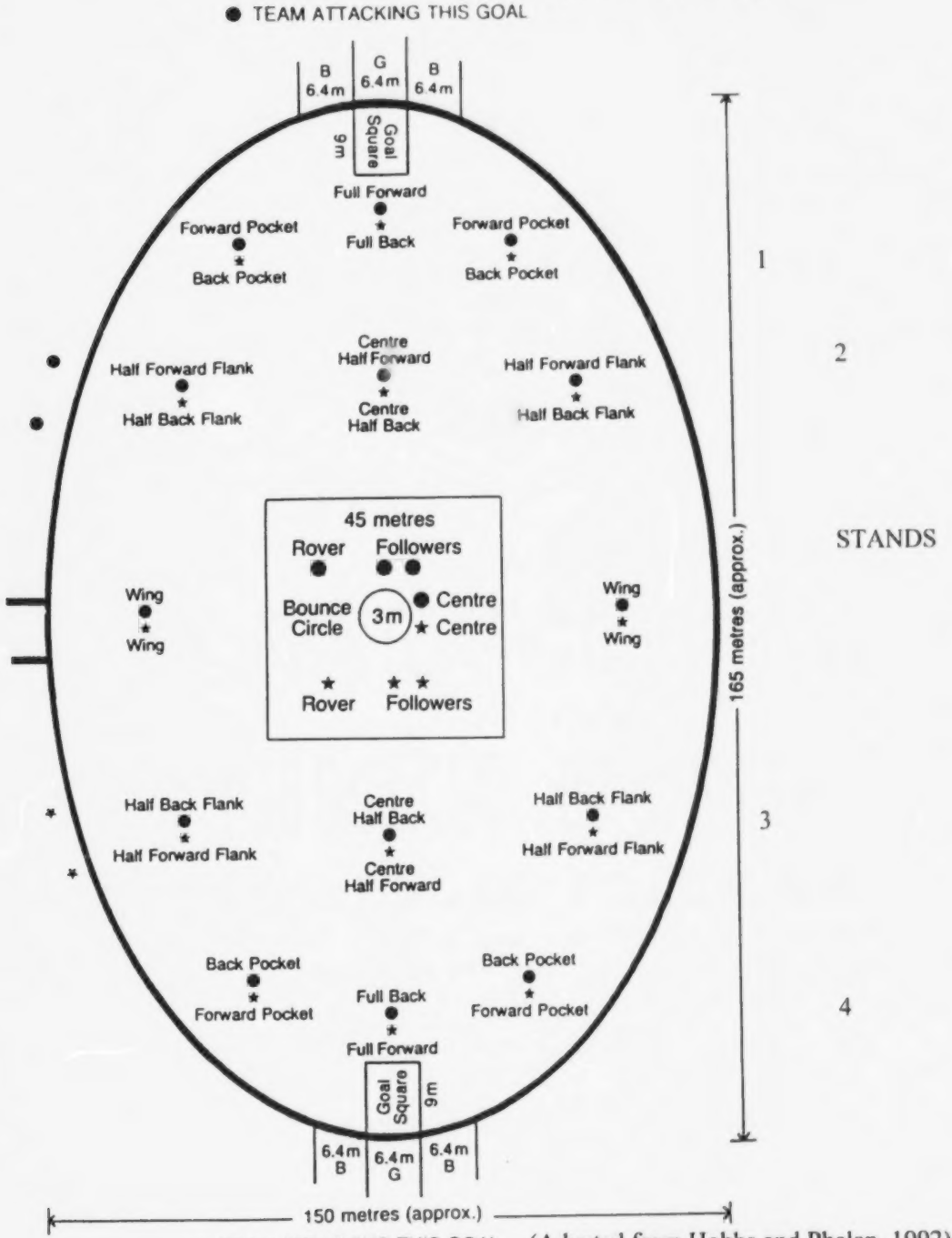
1. CU of Stephen Quartermain (the presenter), cut to
2. CU of a player graphic, cut to

* The ad, cut to

3. CU of Stephen Quartermain.

4. Diagram of the ARF Playing Area

(includes the prime camera postions #1, 2, 3, 4)



(Adapted from Hobbs and Phelan, 1992).

5. Syntagmatic Structure

Analysis of the 30.5 minutes program sequence was based on the following major syntagmatic units:

Elements		
1. Pre-game introduction: - like the antecedent action and exposition of a short story; - consists of 75 shots in four minutes 28 seconds.	2. Game play: - corresponds to the initial incident, rising action and climax of a short story; - consists of 366 shots in 22.5 minutes.	3. Post-game wrap-up: - like the falling action of a short story; - consists of 71 shots in three minutes 37 seconds.
Episodes		
1.1 Opening montage (35 shots) 1.2 Setting the scene (11 shots) 1.3 The Hawthorn club (29 shots)	2.1 Hawthorn vs Essendon (118 shots) 2.2 Collingwood vs Melbourne (175 shots) 2.3 Man in White (21 shots) 2.4 West Coast vs Brisbane (18 shots) 2.5 St. Kilda vs Fitzroy (6 shots) 2.6 Footscray vs Nth Melbourne (5 shots) 2.7 Sydney vs Carlton (19 shots) 2.8 Richmond vs Adelaide (4 shots)	3.1 Statistics (5 shots) 3.2 Marks and Goals of the Week (42 shots) 3.3 Next week's matches + Jason Dunstall montage (24 shots)

5. Shot-by-Shot Analysis
(only a sampling of connotations are provided)
Pre-Game Introduction Shot List
(Length approximately 4 minutes 28 seconds)

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
1	(LS) Aerial view of Ayers Rock	Some notes from a didgeridoo - (an aboriginal wind instrument).	Outback - Australia
2	(CU) Young Aboriginal male with white painted face turns to look directly at the camera.		Aborigines have been acknowledged. Football is indigenous to Australia. It is family entertainment.
3	(CU) Side view of the black and white painted faces of two young football supporters.		
4	(MS) An Essendon player vigorously punches bags held by a trainer in the dressing room.	Program theme music (up tempo, strong base beat). * continues to Shot 19	Show time, the action begins.
5	(MS) Two umpires raise their arms overhead while walking onto the field.		Physical exclamation marks.
6	(MS) Fans thrusting their arms overhead.		Players, umpires, and fans are passionate about football.
7	(MS) West Coast players running onto the field to begin a match.		
8	(MS) Hawthorn players warming up on the field.		Final preparation.
9	(LS) Hawthorn players breaking through a huge banner before the game.		Curtain call. The players are ready.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
10	(CU) Side view of the brown and yellow painted face of a Hawthorn supporter.		The fans are ready.
11	(LS) Black and white balloons float skyward in front of a grandstand packed with people.		Building excitement, spectacle.
12	(MS) Essendon fans waving scarves.		
13	(LS) Crowded grandstand - Foster's signage is prominent.		Sponsors are ready.
14	(MS) Hawthorn player grappling with a West Coast player.		
15	(MS) Leather-clad fans waving their fists.		
16	(MS) West Coast fans doing a high '5'.		Everybody is excited.
17	(MS) Side view of an umpire.		
18	(LS) Aerial view of a crowded MCG on game day.		Privileged viewer position.
19	(LS) Special effect - from the middle of the ground comes a large Essendon banner. Players break through it.	Music continues but at a lower volume. The narrative begins: The AFL finals are only six weeks away and for two clubs its crunch time. Essendon takes on Hawthorn.	Opening of the curtain.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
20	(MS) Essendon players continue to break through the banner and enter the field.	The winner will keep its finals hopes alive, for the loser its curtains.	The event is important.
21	(MS) Hawthorn players warming up.		
22	(LS) Essendon players warming-up.	With so much at stake get set for a wild time as the Hawks and the Bombers go at it.	
23	(LS) Dissolve into an aerial view of the MCG before the game.		Privileged view.
24	(LS) Players running towards a loose ball.	(Music's volume increases and continues until shot #35.)	Males in con-frontation,one physically dominates the others.
25	(CU) Nth Melbourne player takes a mark.		
26	(MS) Essendon player takes a mark over an Adelaide player.		
27	(MS) Melbourne player takes a mark over two teammates.		
28	(MS) Melbourne player takes a mark over a Collingwood player.		
29	(MS) Collingwood player marks one handed over a Carlton player.		Airborne, human tableau equals erections.
30	(MS) Collingwood player attempts a kick while being tackled by a Brisbane player.		Players are physically tough and athletically skilful.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
31	(LS) Ball is kicked, camera zooms back to show the ball going though the posts.		
32	(MS) St. Kilda player running and bouncing the ball.		Ball control is important.
33	(MS) Footscray player takes a mark in front of a Melbourne player.		
34	(MS) Hawthorn player squatted on the ground, rises to his feet and waves his arms overhead.		Celebration of success.
35	(CU Graphic) Folds over like a page to show a still of three players in action with the words 'Australian Rules Football' beside them.	Music finishes	End of Episode One and the preliminary action.
End of Episode One • (Total time = 47 seconds.)			

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
36	(CU) Stephen Quartermain appears, backed by player portrait and the Australian Football League logo.	Narrative continues ... Hello everyone, I'm Stephen Quartermain, and welcome to Round 20 of the Australian Rules Football season for 1992. Just five rounds of football remaining now before the finals ___ action starts and today we feature one of the best games of the year. It's Essendon versus Hawthorn and the loser will bow out of the race. More on that game shortly. Also today we feature the match between Collingwood against Melbourne. Our man in white segment returns with a senior umpire explaining some of the decisions given during the game. Plus don't forget all those spectacular marks and goals of the week. Lets take a look at the team standings after nineteen completed weeks of football.	Formal introduction to the program. Quartermain is the qualified guide. Narrative overshadows the sport.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
37	(CU Graphic) Team Standings - Top Six	And Collingwood is on top of Geelong and Footscray on percentage only. Certainly is a tight tussle for that all important top spot. The West Coast are in fourth position, St. Kilda fifth and Carlton makes up the top six.	Signposts showing important statistics.
38	(CU Graphic) Team Standings - Bottom Eight	The two other teams still in the race are Hawthorn and Essendon which are sixth and seventh respectively. As I said today, the winner will stay alive, for the loser, its curtains. - The rest of the teams are out of contention with the battle for the wooden spoon between Sydney and Brisbane.	This is their last chance.
39	(CU) Stephen Quartermain	Well if you barrack for Carlton, Hawthorn or Essendon you are going to face a nervous few weeks. These three teams are battling it out for the final place in the top six and the chance to play in September and perhaps win the premiership. The draw for all three teams is the crucial factor. All sides face a tough road home although its the Blues who appear to have the hardest assignment.	The competition is fierce.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
40	(CU Graphic) Carlton to Play.	Carlton may be a game clear in sixth spot at the moment but their road home is the toughest of all teams. The Blues play Sydney today, then they meet St. Kilda, Footscray, Collingwood, and the Eagles in Western Australia.	Carlton faces the biggest challenge.
41	(CU Graphic) Hawthorn to Play ...	The Hawks play Essendon, then take on league leaders, Collingwood. Hawthorn then has a reasonable run home. It plays Richmond, then has a bye, then in round 24 takes on Melbourne. Not a bad draw when you compare it to Carlton's.	Advisory signs, what is ahead.
42	(CU Graphic) Essendon to Play ...	Essendon fronts up to Melbourne next week. Then the Bombers face a week's rest. Their last two games are against North Melbourne and Geelong.	
43	(LS) Camera pans right, zooms in on a Hawthorn player taking a mark.	So when you weigh up the three teams' chances - Hawthorn still looks the best prospect but the Hawks must win today, otherwise their task is nearly impossible.	Hawthorn is the team to watch.
44	(MS) Player turns and kicks.		
45	(LS) Camera pans and tilts to follow ball path through the posts.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
46	(MS) Goal umpire signalling a goal.		Success.
End of Episode Two			
47	(CU) Stephen Quartermain with studio backdrop.	Well, Hawthorn are, of course, the reigning premiers and they again started well in 1992, winning the night premiership. However, since then things have not gone well for the Brown and Golds. Injury, suspension and some poor form see the Hawks on the brink of their worst performance for more than a decade. It's crisis time at Hawthorn!	Historical context.
48	(MS) Hawthorn player running with the ball.	Last year Hawthorn won both the night and day premierships. And when it backed up again to win the Foster's Cup in 1992, most football followers were again saying, how for the Hawks. But, how quickly things change. Firstly, they lost their star forward, Dermot Brereton with a hip injury which needed surgery.	Hawthorn were a successful team.
49	(MS) Player about to kick the ball.		
50	(LS) Ball is contacted, camera pans right to follow ball.		
51	(MS) Despite defensive efforts the ball passes through the post (camera tilts up).		
52	(CU) League official and Hawthorn captain hold aloft the night premiership trophy.		Celebration of past triumphs.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
53	(LS) Hawthorn player doing a lap of honour with the trophy.		
54	(MS) The lap of honour continues.		
55	(MS) Trophy held aloft by two players, camera zooms back to show more Hawthorn players.		Star performers.
56	(MS) Hawthorn player running at night practice, receives the ball and collapses to the ground. He is then attended by trainers.		The injury to Brereton is serious.
57	(MS) Injured player in obvious distress with trainers.		
58	(MS) Footscray player handballs as he is about to be tackled by a Hawthorn player.	Another star forward, Paul Deer, broke a thumb missing five weeks and then was suspended for another four, for tripping.	A star has fallen.
59	(LS) Players pursuing the ball, Footscray player gains possession but is tripped by a Hawthorn player.		
60	(MS) Involved players fall to the ground.		
61	(LS) Same players on the ground as the umpire runs to the scene. REPLAY.		
62	(LS) Replay of the trip (#59).		Tripping is a serious offence.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
63	(MS) Players on the ground (#60).		
64	(MS) Hawthorn player on the boundary line moving in to kick goalward, Melbourne player holds the mark. Ball is kicked, camera pans right and tilts up to follow the ball though the posts.	To make matters worse, Captain Gary Ayers had to undergo ankle surgery mid-season and is likely to miss the rest of the year.	Hawthorn are in trouble.
65	(MS) Players scrambling in the mud for the ball, Hawthorn player handballs, camera pans left to follow the ball, Hawthorn player collects and handballs.		Hawthorn is a skilful team despite the absence of star players.
66	(MS) Hawthorn player moves forward to kick.		
67	(MS) Ball is kicked and camera pans and tilts to follow it through the posts.		
68	(MS) Goal umpire signals goal.		
69	(LS) Fans on the field congratulate Hawthorn goal scorer. Two mounted police move in on the scene.	Last week, Deer broke his thumb again and will be out for another month.	Jason Dunstall is a popular star.
70	(MS) Police attempt to disperse the crowd around the player.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
71	(MS) The crowd around the player.	Fortunately for the Hawks, full forward Jason Dunstall had been leading from the front, kicking a century of goals. But even he is now struggling, having only booted one major in the last two games.	
72	(CU) League official and Hawthorn Captain holding aloft the 1991 Premiership Trophy.	Hawthorn has been the dominant force in football for a decade. They have not missed out on a final's campaign since 1981. Perhaps the mighty are about to fall.	Hawthorn are potential champions.
73	(CU) The lettering on the trophy Australian Football League 1991 Premiership Cup Won by Camera zooms back to show the official and player again.		
74	(LS) Hawthorn leaves the playing field surrounded by the media, camera zooms in.		Football is popular amongst Australians.
75	(CU) Stephen Quartermain	One thing about the Hawks, they are always at their best with their backs to the wall. Today will be the ultimate test. Forty one thousand people are at the MCG to watch the clash.	Despite the obstacles, will the Hawks prevail?
End of Episode Three			
End of the Pre-game into * (Total Time = four minutes 28 seconds)			

*** Game Play Shot List for the First 50 Shots**
(Total Element Length = 22.5 minutes)

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
1	(LS) Centre bounce. Score graphic on bottom one third. Ball is bounced and the camera zooms in.	Play by Play: Back to the centre, Greg Deer vs Salmon,	The recom-mencement of play.
2	(MS) Camera pans up, two players top the ball.	Salmon wins it.	
3	(MS) Players in pursuit of the bouncing ball, ball is tracked by the camera.		Competition is fierce.
4	(MS) Hawthorn player taps the ball, Essendon player is held by opponent.	Tapped on by Allen. They are really going in hard.	
5	(LS) Ball is tapped again, camera pans right tracking the ball over the 50 metre circle.	Oh, great play Condon. now its knocked on by Gowers, here's Morrissey back flicking it. Ah, they are playing well Hawthorn.	Hawthorn is dominating play.
6	(MS) Two players collide, ball is still loose, Essendon attempts to smother the ball, it is finally picked up by an Essendon player who handballs.	Harvey	
7	(LS) Essendon player collects the ball.	Kickett	
8	(MS) He kicks while under pressure from opponents.	The quick kick.	
9	(LS) Camera pans lefts following the ball.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
10	(MS) Players in pursuit of the ball, Hawthorn player taps it on.	McDonald trying to tap it back. That was a clever play.	
11	(LS) Players continue to pursue the ball.		
12	(MS) Ball loose, two players collide.	Buick, Ah nearly a free kick to Platin.	Rule infringement.
13	(LS) Hawthorn player collects and handballs.	He ends up with the ball though its onto Alex McDonald.	Play is continuous.
14	(MS) Hawthorn player about to kick.		
15	(LS) Ball is kicked, tracked by camera and marked by a Hawthorn player.	Alex McDonald chips it in and he has found Gowers. Gowers has got to move quickly.	
16	(CU) Hawthorn player turns and kicks.		
17	(LS) Camera pans right to track the ball.	An ordinary kick. It might find Taylor though.	Mark sequence, begins.
18	(CU) Mark taken by a Hawthorn player who then handballs.	Oh, he's looking good.	
19	(LS) Hawthorn player in possession.	Now Jenke.	
20	(CU) he is about to kick.		
21	(LS) He kicks and the camera tracks the ball.	Where's Dunstall? There he is. The leads on, great play Jenke. Good work Dunstall.	Where's the star? (About to mark)

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
22	(CU) Hawthorn player marks and is taken to the ground by an opponent who grabs his shoulders.	First Colour Commentator (C1): Not a bad debut from Taylor, Four kicks and one handball and two goals in your first quarter of AFL Football.	Good individual and team effort.
23	(LS) Goal umpire standing between the posts.		
24	(MS) Hawthorn player retreats to line up the kick, ball is held in one hand.	Second Colour Commentator (C2): It's a dream start isn't it. C1: It's almost Watson like!	
25	(CU) Back to Jason Taylor walking with hands on hips.	C2: Well , and when Hawthorn are playing well don't they find Jason Dunstall with monotonous regularity during the game with passes like that. Play by Play (P by P): They are killing Essendon at the centre bounce. They are just bombarding it out of the centre.	Hawthorn are exuding confidence.
26	(CU) Hawthorn player turning to line up the kick.		
27	(CU) Replay of the mark and collapse to the ground.		A significant event.
28	(MS) Hawthorn player moves forward over the 50 metre circle to kick. Player graphic and goal count appears in the bottom third of the shot.		Star player.
29	(LS) Ball is kicked and the camera pans up and down to track the ball through the posts.	As Dunstall - Ah, it's drifting back, it's another one for the Hawks.	Goal sequence begins.
30	(CU) Goal umpire steps to the line and signals a goal.		The goal signal.
31	(MS) Hawthorn players tapping each other on the bottoms, score graphic appears on the bottom third of the shot.	Dunstall kicks his second and Hawthorn are blitzing Essendon here 7/7 to 1/1.	Player celebration. Australian mateship.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
32	(MS) Hawthorn flag being waved by the crowd.		
33	(MS) Essendon coach in the coaches' box, score is flashed.	Its a very worried looking Kevin Sheedy there as he studies the board trying to decide as to which move he'll make next. C1: What he needs to do and what the players need to do is just shut this game down, Hawthorn are on a roll. They've got a man up. Make sure they stay with that player all over the ground and just try to shut this game up until quarter time.	What will the coach do?
34	(CU) Hawthorn player walking to the right and spits, name graphic appears.		Player recognition.
35	(LS) Centre bounce.	P by P: Back in the middle of the ground. Salmon gets the tap.	Play recommences.
36	(MS) Ruckmen tap the ball.		
37	(LS) Ball is tapped on by Essendon, camera pans left.	Goes over to Calthorpe. McDonald at the half back line.	
38	(MS) Hawthorn player trying to collect the ball, he collects and kicks under pressure.	Now gathers it well and kicks it long.	
39	(LS) Ball is kicked right, camera pans right to where a pack forms.		Mark sequence

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
40	(MS) Essendon player takes the mark and is knocked to the ground. He gets up and moves back while another Essendon player blocks a Hawthorn player.	Good mark from Harvey playing in front. It's a bit of a mismatch in size there and Lawrence has done particularly well in this opening quarter. Harvey, if there is going to be a chance he has to take the front spot which he did well.	Harvey needs to play intelligently.
41	(CU) Essendon player retreating, name graphic appears on the bottom third of shot, player kicks.		Star player.
42	(LS) Ball is out of the shot, camera focuses on a group of players preparing for the mark.	Over the back is Sommerville.	
43	(MS) They all missed the ball.		
44	(MS) Ball is collected by a Hawthorn player.	Allen once again whose playing across the half back line.	
45	(CU) Player kicks.	Ball is a scrubber.	A poor kick.
46	(LS) Camera pans right, ball bounces in the middle of the centre square.		
47	(MS) Ball is collected by a Essendon player who handballs.	Thompson whose being moved up on the ball, give it to Kickett, who has his head taken off.	
48	(MS) Essendon player receives.		
49	(CU) He is tackled high by an opponent and dragged by the jersey to the ground.		Football is a tough male sport.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
50	(LS) Essendon player handballs while being dragged to the ground, umpire runs in to signal free kick, ball is tracked left.	And will take a free kick for the head high tackle. C1: Don't know why players when they get loose like that, like Allen, try to bomb a torpedo punt instead of just kicking a drop punt to a position Tim.	Officials enforce the safety rules.

Post Game Wrap-up Shot List
(Length = three minutes 37 seconds)

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
1	(CU) Stephen Quartermain	Narrative: Lets take a look at the goal kicking table after 20 completed rounds ... And Hawthorn's Jason Dunstall booted 12 for a season's tally of 119. St. Kilda's Tony Lockett has 110. Then there's a big gap to Carlton's Steve Kernahan who has 69. He kicked six this week. North Melbourne's John Longmire has 56. Geelong's Gary Ablett, 54 and Footscray's Danny Del-'Re, 52.	Personal invitation.
2	(CU) Graphic of the leading goal kickers.		These are the stars.
3	(CU) Stephen Quartermain	The team standings, and we have a new leader.	

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
4	(CU) Graphic of the Team Standings - Top Six only.	Footscray back on top, a game clear of Geelong and Collingwood which drops back to third. West Coast fourth, St. Kilda fifth and Carlton makes up the top six. Only one game separates first and fifth. its incredibly tight.	Important statistics - the winners.
5	(CU) Graphic of the Team Standings - Bottom Nine only.	Hawthorn is the other team still in the fight. Essendon's chances I'm afraid are gone. And the battle for the wooden spoon will be between the Sydney Swans and the Brisbane Bears.	The losers.
End of Episode One			
6	(CU) Stephen Quartermain.	Now to the Marks and Goals of the week. Firstly, the marks (natural sound starts).	The week's best.
7	(MS) Hawthorn player about to kick ...	And we start with Hawthorn's Jason Dunstall.	Dunstall has top billing.
8	(LS) He kicks, the camera pans right to focus on a group of players in readiness.	One of his 17 for the day.	
9	(MS) Three shots, Dunstall takes the mark behind two opponents and falls to the ground.	P by P Commentary: Yes, great mark, the ball away to ... Voice over: A screamer from Darren Jarman	A great mark.
10	(MS) Hawthorn player in possession, about to kick.	P by P Commentary: Away go Hawthorn, they look good there.	

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
11	(LS) He kicks, frame tightens on two players.	Here's Jarman!	Another star.
12	(MS) Jarman marks and lands on his feet.		
13	(MS) Essendon player kicks, camera zooms back first, then tightens on a group of players.	Voice over: Another Hawk, Darren Pritchard. P by P: Dean Bailey,	
14	(MS) Pritchard takes a mark in front of an opponent, lands on his feet and starts running.	Oh, great mark Pritchard!	
15	(LS) Players near the 50 metre circle looking up.	Voice over: And Jarman again.	
16	(MS) Jarman takes the mark and falls heavily to the ground on his stomach.	P by P: Oh, what a mark Jarman!	
17	(LS) Hawthorn player kicks, camera pans right and tightens on a group of players.	Voice over: Now another from Jason Dunstall from behind.	
18	(CU) Dunstall marks over two opponents.	P by P: Dunstall at the back, Yes!	Another great mark.
19	(MS) Melbourne player on the boundary line about to kick.	Voice over: A big leap from Melbourne's Shaun Whyte, the former Irishman.	
20	(LS) Player kicks, camera pans right to the group of players.	P by P: Goodwin, his kick close to the boundary line.	

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
21	(MS) Whyte takes the mark and falls to the ground. he is grabbed by an opponent as he tries to go back for a kick. A Melbourne player makes a lead.	Excellent mark taken by Shawn Whyte, as he came in ...	And another great mark.
22	(MS) Collingwood player outside the 50 metre circle kicks, camera pans right, tilts up and down. Swars near the posts takes a mark.	Voice over: And a screamer on the goal line by Melbourne's David Swars. P by P: Ah terrific, David Swars up very high.	Yet another.
23	(MS) Players preparing for a throw in.	Voice over: Now to the goals with Collingwood Captain Tony Shaw from the boundary.	Star player.
24	(CU) Rucks tap the ball.		
25	(MS) Shaw gets the ball.	P by P: ... doing the ruck work for the magpies. Over the top is Andy Goodwin but only as far as Tony Shaw.	
26	(MS) He kicks from near the boundary line.		
27	(LS) Camera tilts up then down as the ball goes through the posts.	I think he may have threaded it through, he has!	Goal.
28	(MS) Shaw congratulated by teammates as he runs back into position.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
29	(MS) Players holding each other tap the ball down, camera zooms out, players scramble for the ball. Sullivan gets it.	Voice over: A right foot snap from the Demon's Chris Sullivan. P by P: ... to take the mark. The young guy doing pretty good on Gary Lyons. Sullivan who started the game on the interchange around his body, and I think he's kicked it. Yes, great goal Sullivan.	A quick kick.
30	(LS) Kicks over his shoulder, camera follows, the ball up and down through the posts, camera zooms in.		Goal.
31	(MS) Players and goal umpire near the posts, Melbourne player claps, umpire signals goal.	Voice over: Hawthorn's John Platin on the run, watch this bend back. P by P: 50 metres out form goal, on to Platin, the little rover on the left foot, now he straightens up on the right, bends it back. Oh he's kicked a goal - great goal!)	Ball follows a curved path.
32	(LS) Players positioning under the ball.		
33	(MS) Hawthorn player marks, Essendon player grabs him, he handballs to Platin who crosses the 50 metre circle from an acute angle.		
34	(LS) He kicks the ball and the camera tilts up then down as the ball passes through the posts.		Goal sequence.
35	(MS) Platin punches the air, turns and runs back into position.		Celebration.
36	(MS) Goal umpire signals a goal.		Success for the offense, failure for the defence.

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
37	(MS) Players scramble for possession outside the goal square.	Voice over: Now two goals from the man they call the 'freak' at Hawthorn, James Morrissey.	Star player.
38	(MS) Morrissey gets possession, evades a tackle near the boundary line and kicks left.	P by P: This time around the corner, he's done it again!	Goal from an acute angle.
39	(MS) Camera tilts up, the frame is tightened, the ball bounces through the posts.		
40	(CU) Morrissey is congratulated by teammates as he runs back to position.		Celebration.
41	(MS) Goal umpire signals goal.	Voice over: Two great goals from the man who played his 100th AFL game today. P by P: ... to Dunstall who could have taken that one, once again Morrissey around the corner, another ripper!	Significant event.
42	(LS) Players positioning for the ball.		
43	(MS) Ball is loose, collected by Morrissey who kicks.		
44	(LS) Camera tracks ball from left side of the field through the posts - camera tilts up then down.		Another goal from an acute angle.
45	(MS) Morrissey is congratulated by teammates.		Celebration.
46	(MS) Goal umpire signals goal.		Success confirmed.
47	(CU) Morrissey continues to be congratulated.		
End of Episode Two			

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
48	(CU) Stephen Quartermain.	Narrative: Yes, the Hawks certainly did have a day out. Now to next week, Round 21. North Melbourne takes on the Sydney Swans, Hawthorn plays Collingwood in the match of the round, and what a game its going to be. Melbourne takes on Essendon, Fitzroy plays Geelong. St. Kilda battles Carlton in another important game. Brisbane plays Adelaide, the Eagles play host to Richmond and Footscray has the bye.	
49	(CU) Graphic for next week.		Contests to watch next week.
50	(CU) Stephen Quartermain.	So that's it for Round 20 of AFL football. The day the Hawks pummelled the Bombers to win by a record margin. We leave you today with some of the highlights from the mercurial Jason Dunstall who returned to form with a dozen goals. Until I see you again next week, its goodbye.	Concluding statements. A record win by Hawthorn. A marquee player. Personal ending.
51	(LS) Players gathering near the goal square.	Music: Theme music with strong base beat begins and plays to the end of the footage.	The program is about to conclude.
52	(CU) Dunstall takes a mark on the line under pressure.		Dunstall, Dunstall, Dunstall!
53	(MS) Dunstall about to kick.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
54	(LS) He kicks and the goal is scored - camera tilts up then down.		
55	(LS) Players in pursuit of the ball.		
56	(CU) Dunstall takes the mark. Graphic for the host, Stephen Quartermain cover half the frame.	Theme music continues.	Important person.
57	(LS) Players group together.		
58	(MS) Dunstall takes the mark and falls to the ground. Graphic for the Graphics Producer, from Bill Browning appears.		Important person.
59	(LS) Players in pursuit of the ball. Dunstall takes chest mark.		
60	(CU) Dunstall marks and falls to the ground. Graphic for Post Production from Editel appears.		Important company.
61	(LS) Camera tracks the ball left, it crosses the 50 metre circle and the camera zooms in. Graphic for music composed by Frank Strangio appears.		Important person.
62	(CU) Dunstall takes a mark. Graphic for Editor, Andrew McColm appears.		Important person.
63	(LS) Players positioning for a mark near the boundary line, camera zooms in.		

Shot #	Image Denotation	Soundtrack	Connotation
64	(MS) Dunstall takes a chest mark and slides over the boundary line. Graphic for Associate Producer, Alan Barham appears.		Important person.
65	(MS) Hawthorn player about to kick.		
66	(LS) He kicks, the camera pans left, Dunstall runs and takes a chest mark. Graphic for the Executive Producer, David Barham appears.	Theme music continues.	Important person.
67	(MS) Dunstall slides along the ground with the ball.		
68	(MS) Dunstall preparing to kick.		
69	(LS) He kicks and the ball is tracked through the posts.		Success.
70	(MS) Hawthorn fans with pom poms celebrate.		Celebration.
71	(CU) Graphic - This has been a Broadcom Australia Production 1992.	Music finishes with an echoing note simulating the didgeridoo sound.	Important acknowledge-ment.

* End of the program.

Appendix III

1. Focus Group Procedure

Participants/Each group consists of four males who fulfil the following criteria:

1. They are between 19 and 34 years of age. This age group represents one of the major target markets for the program and is consistent with age range guidelines recommended by market researchers (Greenbaum, 1993).
2. They are familiar with the highlights program. Participants need to have watched the program at least once in order for them to make sense of it. They must also be comfortable expressing their views in a group situation.
3. They have no relationship (either personal or business) with other participants in the group. Friendships tend to inhibit open discussion; a homogenous group of strangers tend to interact in a positive manner.
4. They have not participated in a focus group for at least a year. Individuals who have been involved in focus group situations tend to compare past and present experiences which may not be beneficial to discussions.

The recruitment of participants utilizes convenience-sampling techniques because of the very specific nature of the investigation. (Last season, ARF ratings ranged from a low of 25,000 to a peak of only 52,000 viewers across Canada.) A screening questionnaire is employed to ensure that all participants meet the stated criteria (see attached).

General Outline

Each focus group is moderated by the researcher in his home between 7:30-9:00 p.m. This arrangement is both non-threatening and practical. The focus group consists of three sections. Section one includes introductory comments and preliminary questions. Section two involves watching the program and formulating general comments. Section three is a discussion structured by a question outline. This varied format provides opportunities for significant points to be pursued within groups while still permitting comparison between groups on key questions. All focus groups are audiotaped for analytical purposes.

The Introduction

On arrival at the focus group venue, participants are provided with a nametag (first name only), offered food and beverages, allocated a seat in the U-shaped arrangement, given a pen and paper, and asked to complete the "Explanation of Study" form.

The moderator's opening monologue follows:

Thank you for coming tonight. I would like to start by asking each of you to say a little about your occupation, interests and your initial impressions of Australian Rules Football. _____, could you start please ... .

Thank you for sharing those with us. Tonight we are going to discuss the Australian Rules Football highlights program with which you are all familiar. Before we get into our discussion, let me make a few requests. First, a reminder that I am audiotaping the session so that I can refer back to the discussion when I write my paper. Do speak up and let's try to have just one person speak at a time. Please do not speak during the video presentation. Write down any comments you may have and share them with us upon the video's completion. Use the pen and paper anytime you need to write something down. During the discussion, I will play policeman to try and ensure everyone gets a turn.

Please say exactly what you think. I am here to learn from you, so do not worry what I or your neighbour may think. I am not marketing Australian Rules Football. Feel free to be critical of the program, the game, or even Australia if you wish. We are here to exchange opinions and have fun while we do it.

Finally, please do not attempt to guess where you think I want the discussion to go. The questioning is very open-ended (adapted from Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990: 92).

The program you will now see is from round 20 in 1992. It is typical of those telecast in the last five years. You will see it in three parts. Part one is the introduction and lasts for four and one half minutes. Part two is the game replays which last for 22.5 minutes, and part three is the three and one half minute conclusion. Upon completion of each part, the following question will be asked: "Any comments, observations, or opinions on what you have just seen?" After the thirty and one half minute video, more specific questions will be asked. (*To conclude the focus group each person is asked to make a summary statement,

the researcher thanks all for sharing their opinions, and the booklet, "A Fundamental Guide to the Game" is distributed.)

Analysis and Reporting

Transcripts are made of the five focus group audiotapes. A descriptive approach is used to analyze the focus group transcripts. This results in the frequent use of direct quotations and little systematic tallying of responses. The aim of the analysis is to gain insight into how audience interpretations are made, not to generalize to a larger population.

As the group is the fundamental unit of analysis, the investigation progresses group by group and then topic by topic. Significant themes or interpretive sets of statements are then identified from all discussion content. For example, a recurring theme may be that Australian Rules Football makes little sense to focus group participants. Sample statements are then used to illustrate this theme in the analysis. A balance is maintained between direct quotations from participants and a summary of their discussions.

2. ARF Focus Group Screener

Name: _____ Home Phone #: _____

Home Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Hello _____, my name is David Cook. _____ gave me your name. I am doing a Master's thesis at the University of Alberta and I am interested in people's impressions of Australian Rules Football. I would like to ask you a few questions.

Question One:

Do you or anyone in your household work for any of the following industries: research and development, marketing, sport or film/television production?

Yes terminate and tally

No continue

Question Two:

Have you participated in a group discussion, interview, or been asked to test any products for research purposes in the last year?

Yes terminate and tally

No continue

Question Three:

Have you watched the Australian Rules Football highlights program on TSN?

Yes continue

No terminate and tally

Question Four:

Are you between nineteen and thirty four years of age?

Yes continue

No terminate

I would like you to come to my house for a group discussion of people's impressions of the Australian Rules Football highlights program on TSN. This discussion will be held on _____(date) starting at 7:30 p.m. and finishing at 9:00 p.m. I am

not trying to sell you anything. I am only interested in your opinions. Food and beverages will be provided.

Question Five:

Would you be willing to participate in the discussion with three other gentlemen?

Yes record information in the first section of the screener

No thank you and terminate

3. Explanation of the Study

Title: Australian Rules Football in Canada

The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of aberrant decoding. When a message produced in one culture is read by people in another culture, different meanings may be produced. Specifically, the Australian Rules Football highlights program telecast on The Sports Network will be used to examine aberrant decoding. Participants in the study will be either interviewed individually or in a group for 90 minutes. All participants are male and familiar with the highlights program. Participation in the study requires consent that the researcher can record responses to questions.

All information provided is confidential. Only the researcher has access to the audiotapes and transcripts. These will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Feedback about this study will be forwarded to the participant upon request.

If there are any questions , please do not hesitate to contact the researcher by telephone or in person.

DATE: _____ RESEARCHER: _____

David Cook (Telephone: (403) 438-5478)

Informed Consent

I, _____ acknowledge that I have read the description of the study, understand the procedure, and give my consent for participation. I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the consent form. I understand that I am free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time without any prejudice to myself.

DATE: _____ SIGNATURE: _____

WITNESS: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

4. Australian Rules Football Focus Groups

Question Outline

Topic 1 - The Program

1. What parts of the program stand out in your mind? (Probe: Why? What factors are involved?)
2. If you were describing the program to a friend, what would you say? (Probe: How would the description vary for different groups, i.e. friends vs. strangers?)
3. Why do you think the program is organized the way it is? (Probe: What do you think is the program's objective?)

Topic 2 - The Game

4. What messages do you get from the program about Australian Rules Football? (Probe: How is this information conveyed by the program?)
5. If you had to describe how to play Australian Rules Football, what aspects would you include? (Probe: What are the important rules of the game?)
6. What are the appealing and non-appealing features of the game? (Probe: Why is the game unique?)

Topic 3 - Comparisons

7. What other sports highlights programs have you seen which are similar to this program? (Probe: How are their formats similar to the Australian Rules Football program?)
8. What other sports have features similar to Australian Rules Football? (Probe: What other sports does it most remind you of?)
9. What is your opinion of the quality of the program. (Probe: How would you improve the program?)

Topic 4 - Australia and Canada

10. What problems do you think could arise with a program that is produced in Australia and telecast in Canada? (Probe: What is the likelihood of the program being misinterpreted?)

11. What does the program tell you about Australian culture or Australians? (Probe: How does the program do this?)
12. What do you think Canada and Australia have in common? (Probe: What features of their sport and television industries are similar?)